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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FROM THE INSIDE – TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: A PRINCIPAL'S CASE STUDY

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I appreciate each and all, beyond words.

Linda Evans

ABSTRACT

School improvement is set within the paradoxical context of compliance-driven agendas, benchmarks, and measurements and an emerging view of teacher professional learning as the key to better student outcomes. The central purpose of this study was to consider the relationship between professional learning, teacher agency and school improvement, and the principal's role in supporting teacher agency in teacher professional learning. It sought to understand the ways in which heightened agency within teacher professional learning can be facilitated by school principals to enable better student outcomes and hence, lead to overall school improvement.

Utilising a qualitative case study methodology based within the researcher's school, the study sought to determine an effective model for teacher professional learning. The theoretical framework drew from the seminal work of Crowther et al. in the area of school improvement with emphasis on teacher and principal leadership of learning. Some impetus was also gained from the work of Logan and Dempster (1992) in relation to their 'four orientations to in-service education' model. The common thread in their work was a view of 'teachers as subjects' who, when provided with opportunities to exert agency within their teacher professional learning, have the capacity to bring about school improvement.

A number of different research methods were used to strengthen and support the case study. Data were drawn from an e-survey, individual interviews conducted by a critical friend of the researcher, a focus group session with teachers and the principal's reflective journal. The findings of this study were presented as five themes that identified conditions or characteristics that enable effective teacher professional learning. These are, in broad terms: time, agency, collaboration, school-based professional learning and principal as lead learner.

A key finding of the study was that with appropriate pressure and support from principal and teacher leaders within school communities, school improvement for the betterment of student learning, is attainable through teacher professional learning. Further, effective teacher professional learning is enhanced when a principal leads by example as a lead learner; when appropriate infrastructure is put in place to allow learning to be fostered, shared and implemented; and when the school's strategic goals

are in alignment with the professional learning opportunities for teachers. On the other hand, effective teacher professional learning is constrained when principals fail to model passion for learning; when they do not implement appropriate infrastructure to support learning; and when they do not direct attention and resources to the building of leadership capacity within their teachers. An important theoretical contribution arising from this study was a reconceptualised model which represents ideal components of effective teacher professional learning.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AITSL	Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership
CDP	Continuing Professional Development
IDEAS	Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAPLAN	National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy
NPDP	National Professional Development Program
PD	Professional Development
PL	Professional Learning
QCOT	Queensland College of Teachers
QCS	Queensland Core Skills (Test)
RC	Regional College

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this, or any other higher educational institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made.

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SIGNATURE: QUT Verified Signature

DATE: February 2015

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 SETTING THE CONTEXT

This research study is an investigation into teacher professional learning in a single school context in Queensland, Australia, with a focus on the role of teacher agency within that learning. As researcher, and also principal of the case study school, I have a strong interest in teacher professional learning as a catalyst for changing teacher practice and, ultimately, for leading to school improvement.

My interest has inevitably been influenced by the neo-liberal political context in which education is currently situated, where widely published data-driven outcomes have generated accountability pressure for all schools. Neo-liberalism can be interpreted in diverse ways. Within this study, it is viewed as an economic force that heightens competition, both internal and external to the school (Servage, 2009) and aligns closely with a business model where output is measured quantitatively. Servage describes the generated accountability as "an essential discourse within neo-liberal governance" (p. 35). Irrespective of definition or interpretation of neo-liberalism, it is clear that within this discourse, teachers have been commodified as key resources for 'ensuring global competitiveness' of a country's education outcomes (Furlong, 2013. p. 29). The way they learn professionally, is therefore of interest.

Set within this broad context of educational scrutiny and accountability, this study focused upon teacher agency in teacher professional learning. Paradoxically, external pressures of accountability have the potential, unless recognised, to counterbalance teacher autonomy in professional learning. Furthermore, the 'enabling state' of neo-liberalism simultaneously proffers the freedom for schools to take care of their own learning (Davies & Bansel, 2007. p. 251) whilst scrutinising outcomes and publishing them prolifically in league table format. Day (2013) refers to classrooms as sites of struggle characterised by simultaneous struggle for financial self-reliance and pressure for ideological compliance.

1.1.1 Continuing professional development (CPD)

Further evidence of external pressure that has influenced the way in which teacher professional learning occurs in schools is the mandating of professional development hours for teachers during the last decade, both across Australia and internationally. For example, in Scotland, the value of '*collaborative* continuing professional development' (CPD) for teachers was highlighted after the Department of Education and Skills, the General Teaching Council for England and the National College for School Leadership called for research into the characteristics of effective professional learning communities in 2005 (Kennedy, 2011. p. 26). Nonetheless the Scottish CPD model continues, as in most countries, to focus on an "individualised, standards-based framework" (Kennedy, 2011. p. 39). In Hong Kong, recent attention has been given to the value of quality CPD and it is stipulated that "school teachers should accumulate 150 hours of CPD over a three-year cycle" (Lee, 2011. p. 32). In Queensland, Australia, the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) which regulates teacher registration, mandates that any teacher who teaches for more than 20 days, must complete a minimum of 20 hours of CPD.

Interestingly, this is a reduction of the previously required 30 hours of CPD that was operational in Queensland between 2010 and 2012. (http://www.qct.edu.au/faqs.html). This is in line with the National Professional Standards for Teachers, renamed the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) which were endorsed by all Australian State and Territory Ministers for Education in December 2010. The Australian Professional Standards defines teacher professionalism and also informs the development of professional learning goals for teachers (AITSL, 2011. p. 3). It is also consistent with New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern territory where teachers are required to participate in 100 hours of "professional development activities" per five year period in order to maintain their registration as teachers (Mockler, 2015. p. 38).

1.1.2 Teacher appraisal

Along with a focus upon the completion of mandated CPD, attention both locally and internationally has been given to a formalised system of teacher appraisal (Jensen & Reichel, 2011). The Grattan Institute Report of 2011 is the third in a series on 'investing in our teachers' (p.3). The authors of this report, Jensen & Reichel, argue that teacher effectiveness can be improved by up to 30% through appropriate systems of teacher appraisal and feedback that are directly linked to improved student performance (p. 3). However, their extensive research also points to teacher cynicism in regard to appraisal systems; teachers equate appraisal with an administrative exercise that bears little relationship to the improvement of student outcomes. Such scepticism may well have its roots in the historical supervisory practices of the past, evident in inspectorial visits or the 'unannounced visit by the principal' (Walkley, 1998). This suspicion of appraisal motivation was evident in the research conducted by Down, Chadbourne & Hogan (2000) who also found significant teacher distrust around performance management.

Interviewed prior to the implementation of a state-mandated performance appraisal scheme and twelve months later, teachers in the study by Down, Chadbourne & Hogan (2000) noted that the experience was less onerous than they had anticipated. The factors that led to any enjoyment of the process were clear: choice and ownership. Nonetheless there was more to be critical of than appreciative. Some teachers rallied against the imposition of a top-down initiative, many cited poor implementation and others talked about lack of time and thus the superficiality of the exercise.

In contrast to professional development that is 'done to' staff or enforced teacher appraisal schemes that are accountability inspired rather than learning inspired (Down, Chadbourne & Hogan, 2000), the driving force behind my work as a principal and this study was to provide the conditions and support that enabled teachers to engage in a range of professional learning experiences that would be personally and professionally meaningful.

This study sought, then, to investigate the conditions where professional learning experiences including classroom visits, peer partnerships, or examination of existing

practices would not cause fear or anxiety, rather lead to teachers being the primary agents of school improvement, or at least, as identified by Down, Chadbourne & Hogan (2000) : to have choice in, and ownership of their learning. Additionally, the study looked at the principal's place in supporting teacher agency in teacher professional learning, whilst being cognisant that accountability and performance appraisal are implicitly or explicitly attached to the role of principal.

1.1.3 Impetus for the study

With a renewed interest in teacher appraisal, performance-based and the regulation of, and focus on continuing teacher professional learning, pressure for school improvement has been further strengthened through recent Australian government initiatives such as the establishment of *My School*, an online tool which allows access to comparative school data in regard to a diversity of individual school information. This tool also reflects the pervading neo-liberalist reform agenda which uses measurement of student performance, and hence teacher performance to drive improvement.

The regulation of professional development hours for teachers along with tools to measure student performance can be seen variously as a tool to enhance professional learning, a tool for teacher appraisal, or a regulatory device (Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald & Bell, 2005). Alternatively they can also be viewed as 'a policy response aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching and the status of the teaching profession' (Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald & Bell, 2005. p. 159). This context of accountability pressure is significant but, as indicated earlier, was not the driving force for my study. Rather, my own research was far more locally based, with interest in how effective teacher professional learning could be enhanced through teacher agency and therefore developed within my school environment to lead to school improvement. Interlinked with the focus on professional learning were, therefore, complementary key concepts such as school improvement, teacher agency, teacher leadership, principal leadership, education change and collaborative practice.

This chapter begins with the site context for the study, discusses the study's purpose, then the significance of the study is noted. A description of the underpinning theoretical framework follows, and next the research questions that emerged from the

literature are outlined. Following this, the role of the researcher and the methodology are explained. Some key definitions are included and finally, the section concludes with an overview of the chapters in the thesis.

1.2 SITE CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

The pseudonym Regional College (RC) is used throughout this thesis wherever reference is made to the school where the study is located: an independent girls' day and boarding school in regional Queensland. The needs of the 225 boarding and 595 day students of RC, differ significantly for varied reasons. For example, the 40% of the secondary students who are boarders have learning requirements that are varied and, at times, complex. Some have been home-schooled for their primary years, some have attended tiny and remote schools as the only student in a particular year level, and some are attending RC to broaden their educational experience. For each and every boarder, there are specific requirements related to living 'on-campus' of which their teachers need to be cognisant. Furthermore, the needs of the full student population are important, and the specific learning requirements of each day girl from kindergarten through to year 12 is also significant.

The teaching staff at the time of study at RC included 68 full time members, varying from recent graduates and early career teachers to highly experienced teachers. Generally, teachers at the school enjoy working in a supportive school environment with motivated students, where literacy and numeracy levels are significantly above state means and where parental expectations for successful outcomes are high. Teachers demonstrate a strong level of commitment to the school, to the students, and to their professional practice.

Since I took up the role of principal in 2009, I have led a concerted focus on broadening the learning culture to include an emphasis on the quality of teacher learning. A targeted strengthening of teacher professional learning opportunities occurred, and with this, some shift in views about what constitutes professional learning has occurred also. Since 2011, in addition to participation in regular off-site professional learning, teachers have engaged in an increasing multiplicity of school-based learning activities. While some of these activities have been mandatory, many of these have been voluntary. In the past five years a number of different educational

consultants have been employed at the school, for a minimum of a year at a time, to work specifically with teachers in matters pertaining to their pedagogical practice in situ.

The motivation to make these changes to the structure of teacher professional learning stemmed from my interest, and continues to do so, in examining teaching and learning practices in context, rather than from a distance. Consequently, there have been opportunities for teachers to engage in action research, peer partnerships, and, coinciding with the research study, a collaborative practices pilot project. This collaborative practices pilot project ran for twelve months in 2011, and emerged from my own growing understandings about the importance of context-based, ongoing, collaborative teacher professional learning, as developed through this doctoral study. The collaborative practices pilot project is described in detail in the methodology chapter as it is part of the context for this study and it was completed almost simultaneously with collection of data for this study.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to investigate teacher understandings of professional learning at RC and to strengthen my understanding as researcher/principal in relation to principal leadership of effective teacher professional learning. It was concerned with professional learning for organisational improvement, that is, improvement that begins with teachers in their day-to-day practice. It sought to ascertain the effects of a more 'cultural-inductive approach' to professional learning rather than the more traditional 'techno-rational-top-down' approach (Caena, 2011. p. 4), an approach focusing on the heightening of teacher agency within their professional learning.

Adey (2004. p.3) reminds that "the continuing professional development of teachers remains the most important force in the quest for educational improvement". The importance of professional learning as a means of school capacity-building or gaining improvement of educational outcomes for students is supported by a strong body of research (Adey, 2004; Crowther, 1994 to 2011; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Lingard & Renshaw, 2010; Luke & McArdle, 2009; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009). Central to the effectiveness of professional learning is the place of teacher as agent

within that learning and the principal's role in facilitating teacher agency. A body of research supports the argument that sustained school improvement can be facilitated by building teacher capacity through teacher agency in teachers' professional learning (Frost & Harris, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; O'Brien, 2006; Sachs, 2003) particularly where that learning involves teachers as leaders of learning (Crowther, 1994 to 2011; Duignan, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Menter & Hulme, 2010).

1.3.1 Professional standards

As noted, the study was set within the context of significant changes for teachers in terms of the articulation of professional standards, discussions of performance-based pay and mooted appraisal systems. Teacher professional learning was highlighted because of these initiatives and gave impetus to understanding how it might work best in an RC context. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in its charter for professional learning for teachers and school leaders states that "professional learning will be most effective when it takes place within a culture where teachers and school leaders expect and are expected to be active learners, to reflect on, receive feedback on and improve their pedagogical practice, and by doing so to improve student outcomes" (AITSL, 2012. p. 3.) Yet, prior to the mandating of CPD hours by the Queensland College of Teachers' professional learning was more decentralised, ad hoc and it was feasible that it was often entirely incidental.

The 2011 Grattan Institute Report sees The National Professional Standards for Teachers as a positive development in describing what qualities and behaviours we value in an effective teacher. However, the Standards are not a tool for appraising teachers. The report predicts that in the future, the standards will be linked to performance management processes in schools (p.37). Such speculation gave greater purpose to the study and provided an important springboard for action and deeper reflection on the effectiveness of professional learning practices occurring at RC. Essentially, as principal I was also interested in ensuring that money devoted to teacher learning, was spent effectively and was leading to better outcomes for students.

The study was therefore primarily concerned with understanding conditions that heighten teacher agency in teacher professional learning as well as my own role as principal in supporting that teacher agency. It sought to explore factors that enable and constrain teacher agency as reflected in current literature, as well as through the case study undertaken at RC. Its ultimate purpose was to understand the ways in which effective teacher professional learning structures within a school, can lead to school improvement.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Growing research indicates that teacher professional learning is the key to school improvement. Given the importance of effective teacher professional learning, this study is significant for three reasons.

Firstly, it is significant because of the paucity of research relating to the role of teacher agency within teacher professional learning. As is indicated in the associated research literature (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Chapman & Allen, 2006; Crowther, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Guskey, 1995; Harris, 2010; Luke & McArdle, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) as well as policy documents relating to teacher professional standards, teacher appraisal and continued professional development for teachers (Jensen & Reichel, 2011; QCOT, 2007; AITSL 2012) the role of effective teacher professional learning as a means of school improvement has been underscored. The Australian Teacher Professional Standards as established in 2012 highlight the important role of professional learning as a tool to ‘change teacher and school leader behaviour in order to improve student outcomes’ ((AITSL, 2012. p.2). As well, recent research (see Caena, 2011; Gumus, 2011; Hunzicker, 2011; Opfer & Pedder, 2011) has indicated that traditional forms of professional learning and development are far less effective, or even ineffective, in improving teacher practice as a means of school improvement.

Yet research also points to the value of a knowledge production approach to teacher professional learning, over a model of knowledge consumption (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009), learning that is job-embedded, ongoing, in depth, content focused, collaborative, and encouraging of reflective thinking (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Newmann, Youngs, Grove & King, 2000). The current study was significant because

its view of professional learning was one that valued knowledge production, rather than knowledge consumption; was embedded within the RC context; took place over time; focussed on collaborative, content-focussed and reflective learning for teachers.

While research and policy documents point to the necessity for a collaborative culture of teacher professional learning to bring about school improvement and change, the context in which schools operate is one of compliance-driven agendas, centrally mandated professional standards and competencies for teachers that constitute them as vehicles for economic improvement (Burstow & Maguire, 2014. pp. 103-104). The paradox that exists between governments seeking school improvement through regulation of CPD or teacher professional learning and teachers exercising agency in their learning provided an interesting context for the study. The context of accountability adds further interest to the role of teacher agency in teacher professional learning.

Therefore, this study is significant in its exploration of teacher agency within teachers' own professional learning, since the literature indicates that teacher agency is required for change [or improvement] to occur, through a degree of ownership of the decision-making change process (Day, 1999. pp. 97-98). The role of teacher agency within teacher professional learning is a narrow field of research yet it is argued that without the power of agency, teacher learning is less likely to be sustained, and hence there is less transferability to improved classroom practice (see Fullan, 1993; Hattie, 2012; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; O'Brien, 2006).

Secondly, the study was significant because there is very little research that considers the principal's role in heightening teacher agency in teacher professional learning. Yet, in researching what teachers want from their principals, Hauserman & Stick (2013, p. 196) found that teachers wanted to be "trusted to take risks"; teachers taking risks in their learning draws from, and creates agency and empowerment for them. Further to this, Dempster (2012) emphasises the critical role of the principal in establishing a climate that allows the freedom for teachers to lead learning. Hence there is value in principals understanding how they can facilitate the heightening of teacher agency within teacher professional learning.

Since it is assumed that improvement is the shared goal of all schools and their leaders, then a study that explored the way in which teacher agency can be enabled by school principals, is of significance. That this field of research is very narrow lends greater meaning to the study. Crowther's (2011) research in the areas of teacher and principal leadership found that alignment between principal and teacher is fundamental to enabling 'school wide pedagogical enhancement' (p.167). This study explored the crucial interrelationship between principal and teachers within the field of teacher professional learning, and proposed that 'conjoint leadership' is a preferred term to Crowther, Hann & McMaster's 'parallel leadership' because it places greater emphasis on the shared space between principal and teacher, a space where conjoint agency can be fostered. In light of government and regulatory interest in teacher professional learning, this study provided further insight into the role of the school principal in strengthening professional learning practices which heighten teacher agency and thus learning effectiveness.

Thirdly, the study is significant because of its focus on the effectiveness of professional learning grown and nurtured from inside a school. Fox and McCormick (2009) in researching CPD note that "much of the research shows that effective CPD requires clear needs identification, and should include collaboration, mentoring and coaching, reflection and the sharing of knowledge within schools (p. 199)." Outsourced or external professional learning events such as conferences did not feature as significant to the research. This aligns with the work of Crowther et al. (1994 to 2011), who, over nearly two decades instigated the 'Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools' (IDEAS) project which situated professional learning within schools themselves, places he argued that real reform is located and where learning is sustainable.

Coupled with teacher learning located within schools is the parallel concept of distributed leadership. Studies conducted by researchers such as: Cardno, 2008; Crowther et al. 2002; Dinham, 2005; Fullan, 2014; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006 and Timperley, 2011 point to the importance of sharing leadership of learning to support its effectiveness.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study drew initially upon a four quadrant model for 'in-service' education for teachers as designed by Australian researchers, Logan and Dempster (1992). Logan and Dempster developed a conceptual model for understanding in-service education, an allied term to professional learning and professional development. The central tenet of their model is the view that in-service education can involve teachers-as-objects or teachers-as-subjects in the process of professional learning. They acknowledged the diversity of approaches required for in-service education, from mandated initiatives that principals are duty-bound to implement, to those modes that focus upon reconstructive approaches to the ways in which teachers enact their professionalism.

It was the 'experimentalism' quadrant of their model that provided initial impetus for the study. Within this quadrant, teachers are constituted as subjects capable of reconstructing knowledge through learning that is collaborative, personal, relational and contextualised. The learning activity described suggested teacher agency, as a key focus of the study.

The primary input into the theoretical framework was the work of Australian academic and researcher Crowther (2011). His contribution to teacher professional learning over the past two decades has been in the combined areas of teacher leadership and principal leadership and how in tandem they work together to create school effectiveness. The parallel leadership model of Crowther, Hann & McMaster (2001) provided a conceptual stimulus for consideration of the intersecting constructs of leadership, learning and school improvement. Drawing further upon the work of Crowther, emerged an interest in the way in which teacher agency within professional learning, when led conjointly by principal and teachers, could be a catalyst for change, improvement and capacity building. This teacher 'change agentry' (Fullan, 1993) was a key concept that was explored in the study.

Underpinning the concept of agency was the common thread of 'teachers as subjects' shared by Logan and Dempster, and Crowther, since the investigation focused so

strongly upon teacher perceptions of agency, or their capacity to make a difference as leaders of learning (O'Brien, 2006. p.77).

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Two research questions arose from my interest, as school principal, in understanding teacher professional learning within RC. In devising a relevant research strategy and reading within current literature in this area, it was apparent that the nature of leadership and the level of teacher agency within the professional learning structures were key concepts for exploration (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Crowther, 2010; DuFour, Dufour & Eaker, 2009; O'Brien, 2006; Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008; Turnbull, 2005) in schools seeking improvement.

For this reason the two research questions were:

- What processes enable or constrain increased levels of teacher agency within teacher professional learning in a whole school context?
- How, and in what ways, do school principals influence the development of professional learning for teachers in a school?

1.7 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methodology used in this study was an interpretive case study that explored the professional learning perceptions and practices of teachers at RC. Through the choice of methodology, an interpretivist case study, a vehicle for viewing and understanding teacher professional learning practices at RC through a different lens was provided. The application of this methodology allowed for a context-sensitive investigation and placed value upon the participants' perceptions and judgments. Through triangulation of data, the study was designed to gain authentic insights and knowledge about professional learning within the school context. Semi-structured individual interviews, a qualitative e-survey, a focus group session, and my own reflective journal formed the basis of the data.

The choice of an Education Doctorate reflected my interest in a workplace-based research approach which valued insiderness, context knowledge and sought to have a wide-reaching effect upon the organisation that was being studied. Furthermore, the

professional doctorate aims to contribute to professional development within a particular profession (Costley & Stephenson, 2009) which was most appropriate, given the subject of the study. The methodology, methods for data collection and the Education Doctorate itself were chosen as a means of understanding the case under study, exploring its nuances and ultimately contributing to better practice within the field of education and specifically in relation to teacher professional learning.

More specific detail regarding the philosophical basis of the methodology, the choice of methods, and the timeline for research, is contained in Chapter 3.

1.8 DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

The following key terms are used throughout this thesis with the following interpretation or definition:

1.8.1 Teacher agency

In the context of this study teacher agency is defined as: teachers having the opportunity to choose and engage in professional learning activities that lead to a change in school and classroom practice.

1.8.2 Professional learning

The term professional learning is preferred over such allied terms as professional development and in-service and draws from Day's view of professional learning as on-going, differing between personal, planned and opportunistic, and being flexible in nature (Day, 1999). Its effectiveness is heightened in the presence of teacher agency.

1.8.3 Leadership

The work of leadership is both complex and varied, and resists easy definition. Of interest to this study is the conjoint space between principal leadership and teacher leadership which shares a collaborative approach to learning. Crowther, Ferguson & Hann's (2009) view of teachers as leaders and subjects, rather than objects within the learning process underpins the study's approach.

1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of the introductory chapter is to introduce the research and associated questions. It provides some context information and offers justification of the chosen research methodology and methods. It argues for the importance of the study in terms of its broader relevance to the professional learning and continuing professional development (CPD) agenda of teachers and principals. It introduced in brief terms, the collaborative practices pilot project which was not the focus of the study, but an important teacher professional learning activity at RC that is discussed at both survey and interview and expanded upon in Chapter Three. It also set the parameters for interpretation of such key terms as agency, professional learning and leadership. A brief summary of the following chapters has been included, providing a guide to the content and discussion to follow.

Chapter 2 – reviews the literature pertaining to organisational improvement in a school context through the concepts of teacher agency, professional learning, teacher leadership, principal leadership and educational change. The theoretical framework is identified in detail, indicating the complex inter-relationship between these key concepts and the way in which they can be best represented for school improvement.

Chapter 3 – includes the research methodology, study design, and its philosophical underpinnings. It explains the interpretative qualitative research paradigm in which the study is situated, expands upon the case study research approach and gives emphasis to the co-construction of meaning between researcher (principal) and participants (teachers), in the choice of data collection and data analysis strategies.

Chapter 4 – outlines, collates and analyses the data that has been collected through a survey, a series of semi-structured interviews, a focus group session, and the principal's reflective journal. Through separating findings, then clustering those findings into themes and sub-themes this chapter identifies the important components of a framework for effective teacher professional learning.

Chapter 5 – is a discussion of findings, and identifies and elaborates upon the central themes identified through the analysis of the data. It incorporates associated literature

and discusses the commonalities and differences between the findings and the literature .This chapter proposes a reconceptualised model for effective professional learning within a school. This model places emphasis on teacher agency, collaborative practice and the sharing of leadership between principal and teachers with the purpose of school improvement.

Chapter 6 – provides a summary of the findings of the research that focused on the effects of principal leadership upon a school's professional learning culture, particularly in relation to the role of teacher agency as a catalyst for deep and sustainable teacher professional learning. Further to this, the chapter considers the implications of the study findings for principals and researchers, and suggests possible areas of future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This study explored teacher agency and professional learning structures within a school context and sought to explore the nature of the dynamic interrelationship between the two concepts. In order to do so, it considered the contributing effects of principal leadership, teacher leadership, and the ways in which professional learning opportunities are organised and offered within a school. Ultimately, the purpose of the study was to understand how professional learning can be facilitated within a school to enhance teacher learning, and, in so doing, create a link to positive school improvement. To understand the preferred mechanisms for facilitating this, it is important to also understand the role of teacher agency as a catalyst for deeper, sustainable teacher professional learning.

The relevance of such a study has been highlighted through the recent mandating of hours of professional development and tying these to teacher registration in Queensland, Australia. It also reflects ongoing research that links teacher professional learning with school improvement and teacher quality, and with improved student outcomes. There is no one body of research that captured the literature upon which such a study can be developed. Therefore, the review of the literature draws upon interrelated areas relevant to the study, including school improvement; educational leadership, teacher agency; professional learning and collaborative practice. Within the broad category of educational leadership, principal leadership, distributed leadership and teacher leadership were also considered.

The literature review is divided into five main sections. The first section defines the context in which professional learning is explored and its link to school improvement. It looks specifically at the professional standards framework and continuing professional development requirements that have created impetus for a focus on school improvement. It then considers some specific studies, both local and international, that have explored different means of attaining school improvement.

The second section is used to explain the key terms of educational leadership, teacher agency, and professional learning, since the interpretation of these terms is pivotal to

the ways in which the literature has been 'read'. The third section discusses the ways in which school processes can assist in enabling effective professional learning. Specifically, this refers to heightening teacher agency within teacher professional learning, developing collaborative approaches to teacher learning and the role of the principal in leading teacher professional learning within a school context. The final section discusses the theoretical framework that was used as the theoretical underpinning for this study. This literature forms the basis for exploration of the following research questions that drive the study:

- What processes enable or constrain increased levels of teacher agency within teacher professional learning in a whole school context?
- How, and in what ways, do school principals influence the development of professional learning for teachers in a school?

2.2 SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

> To improve schools, one must be prepared to invest in professional development; to improve teachers; their professional development must be set within the context of institutional development (Hargreaves, 1994. p. 436)

This first section of literature discusses the context that drives improvement in schools. As part of this, it considers the introduction of the teacher professional standards framework within all Australian states in 2003, and the mandated continuing professional development requirements for teachers across Australia. Further, this section looks at studies in school improvement both locally and internationally.

Organisational improvement and school improvement are currently set within the context of a neo-liberalist accountability agenda that is apparent not only in Queensland and other Australian states, but also in many western economies (Furlong, 2013; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). For the purposes of this study, neo-liberalism is seen as an economic force that heightens competition, both internal and external to the school (Servage, 2009) and mirrors a business model where output is measured quantitatively. Notwithstanding the definition or interpretation of neo-

liberalism, teachers have been commodified as key resources for ‘ensuring global competitiveness’ of a country’s education outcomes (Furlong, 2013. p.29). The way they learn professionally, is therefore of interest to me, as a school principal seeking school improvement and to governments seeking a means of gaining a competitive edge compared with other countries, in terms of student outcomes.

Principals need to lead in a terrain that is characterised by weighty performance accountabilities whilst retaining their own moral and professional accountability. Apple (2004) describes this as the contradictory discourse of competition, markets, and choice on one hand and accountability, performance objectives, standards, national testing, and national curriculum on the other hand (p.15). Whilst some believe that the performance agenda central to neo-liberalism (Risvi & Lingard, 2010) constructs professional learning as a tool to achieve standards and compliance, rather than changing the way teachers think and practice their craft (Bredeson, 2003. p. 16), other commentators view it as a worthy means to an end. The introduction of professional standards for teachers as a twenty-first century phenomenon reflects this focus upon measurement, accountability and transparency of practice. It also echoes Apple’s description of a contradictory discourse because these standards are also utilised as a guide for teacher professional learning and individual growth as a teacher professional. The Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders describes professional learning as a means of developing individual and collective capacity as measured by student outcomes (2012. p.2). Standards, along with Continuing Professional Development, are a direct result of an effort to meet the rapidly changing ‘social, economic and technological conditions in which schools exist’ (Cloonan, 2008. p.3).

Pressure to perform, and to meet the needs of each individual student whilst fulfilling school-level benchmarks provides the context in which school improvement is placed. Ironically, these pressures can overwhelm the key focus of schools: quality teaching and learning. Campbell and McNamara (2010. p. 23) also write about government spending on the “technical-rational” rather than focusing on “an investment in the transformative agenda” (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler as cited in Campbell & McNamara, 2010. p.23) which research has found to be the catalyst for

real school improvement where change is embedded in teacher practice at a deep, rather than a superficial level.

Contrary to a technical-rational approach to school improvement, school improvement is linked to school cultures where teacher learning is embedded in practice (Dufour & Marzano, 2009; Fullan, 2014), occurs within the organisation (Barth, 2002; Senge, 1990; Spillane, 2002) and is context-specific (Dufour, Dufour & Eaker, 2009; McWilliam, 2002). There are also 'no silver bullets' (Cordingley & Needham, 2010) that lead to quick fix improvement either, dialogic conditions (Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell, Mockler, Ponte & Ronnermann, 2012. p.133) for discussion, reflection (Turnbull, 2005) and planning time for effective individual and personalised professional learning ((Crowley, 2013) underpin sustainable conditions for improvement.

Yet, akin to schools, governments are motivated to find quick avenues to improve student learning. They do so through various neo-liberalist means: mandated changes, measurement comparisons, performance pay, tying funding to outcomes, investigating teacher preparation courses, and, sometimes, by focusing on professional learning and professional development for teachers in schools. Harris (2010), in writing of the school improvement agenda in Wales, emphasises that 'within-school' variation in student outcomes is most acute at the level of the individual teacher (p.29) where improvement must begin if student outcomes are to improve. Her paper also discusses the growing importance of the professional learning community as a pillar for school improvement and reform: a place where teachers work together collaboratively. The notion of improvement of school performance through pedagogical improvement is identified by Rizvi and Lingard (2010) as an effect created through effective professional learning for teachers:

> It seems to us that in respect of improving pedagogical practices, some level of trust of teachers and their professionalism is needed within a supportive professional development framework and the creation of teacher professional learning communities within schools. This demands investment in teacher professional development (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 103).

Chapman and Allen (2006) also discuss the growing trend in the United Kingdom to utilise collaborative practices within teacher professional learning as a means of raising standards in educational systems. Their discussion is backed up by Harris (2008) who writes of co-construction and professional learning as core features of Development and Research networks in England. A study of the best school systems in the world found that schools in those systems focused on providing the "high-quality, collaborative, job-focused professional development" characteristic of "professional learning communities" in which teachers work together to help each other improve classroom practice (Barber & Mourshed 2007. p. 30). Of interest to the study were the notions of collaborative and job-focused professional learning as a means of school improvement at the school site, referred to as RC.

2.2.1 Professional standards and professional learning

As is reflective of government interest in tying professional learning and professional standards to school improvement, in 2003, all Australian states and territories, through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), agreed to a professional standards framework for teachers and principals. This national framework provided a basis for expectations of pre-service teacher education, teacher performance as well as principal performance across Australia. Inherent within this framework was a commitment to professional learning for teachers also, as fundamental to their professional status. This is exemplified within the charter, as the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework sits alongside the Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders.

Figure 2.1 demonstrates graphically, the close alignment between professional standards for Australian teachers and professional standards for Australian principals. These standards underpin effective professional learning for both groups and, according to this framework, are the platform for high quality teaching and student learning.

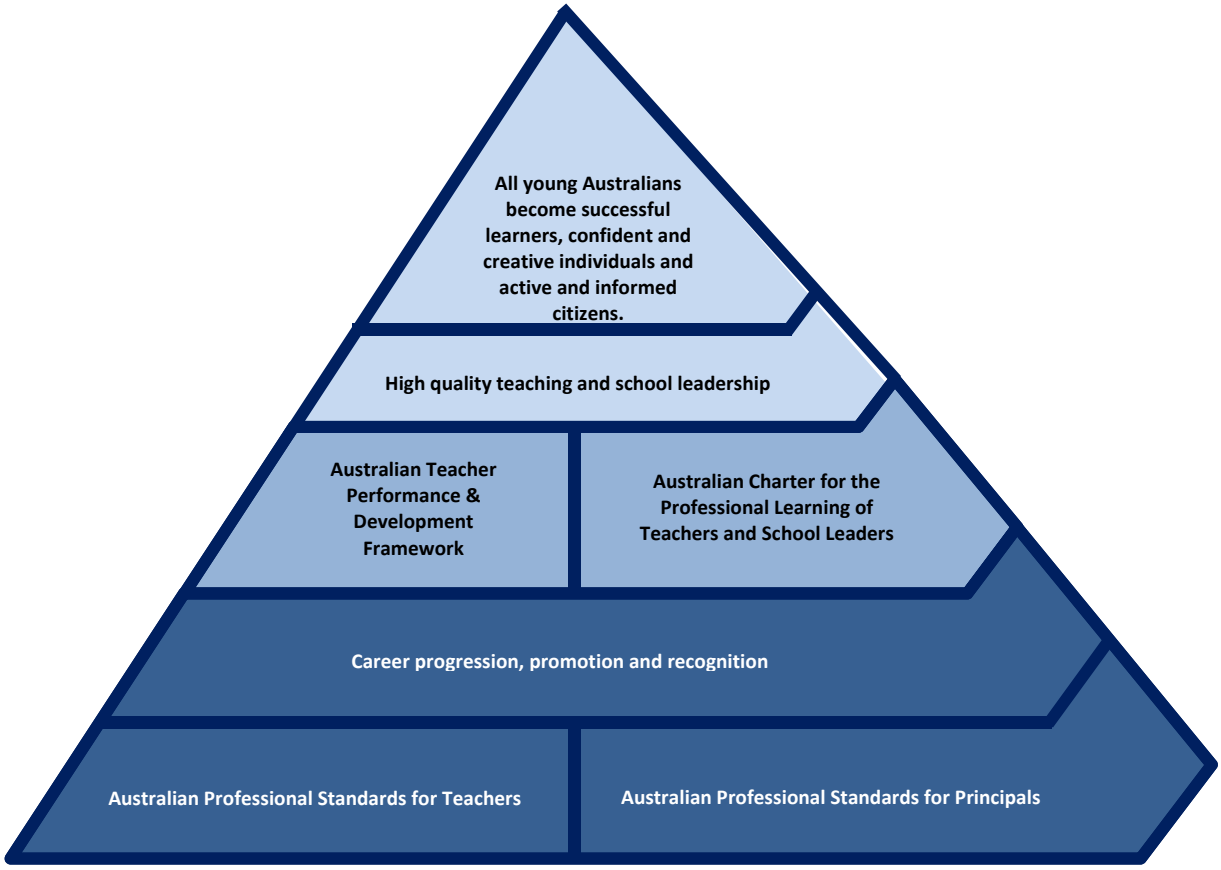

Figure 2.1. Professional learning in context. Adapted from "AITSL model," by The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012, p.2.

There are seven standards that underpin the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers that describe the three domains of teaching as: professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement, the latter domain includes two standards concerned with teacher professional learning and community engagement. In particular, Standard Six is concerned explicitly with professional learning (2011. p. 18). Figure 2.2 outlines the four categories within the professional learning standard which specifies identification, engagement and application of professional learning.

6.1	Identify and plan professional learning needs
6.2	Engage in professional learning and improve practice
6.3	Engage with colleagues and improve practice
6.4	Apply professional learning and improve student learning

Figure 2.2. AITSL Standard Six: Engage in Professional Learning. Adapted from "The AITSL National Professional Standards for Teachers," by The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011, p. 18.

Whilst principals are charged with the responsibility of "engaging in and modelling learning and leading the development of a learning culture within schools" (AITSL PL Charter, 2012. p. 6) there is no specific standard for principal professional learning within the AITSL Australian Professional Standard for Principals. Rather, they are required to model effective leadership; be committed to their own ongoing professional development; create a positive culture of challenge and support; have a key responsibility for developing a culture of effective teaching; and lead, design and manage the quality of teaching and learning and for students' achievement in all aspects of their development (AITSL Australian Professional Standard for Principals, p.9).

There are lofty ideals inherent in the AITSL documents, ones which Mulcahy (2011) deems as reflective of [our] nation's aspirations to be competitive in relation to standards of teaching, on a world stage (p.95). Invariably this creates accountability pressure for schools, particularly when fuelled by public documentation of data comparisons. In creating standards there is both a heightened focus on teacher performance, teacher learning, student outcomes and also a reduction of the definition of these fundamental aspects of the profession to a series of standard and specific statements which reduce the multiplicity of practices which constitute professionalism (Mulcahy, 2011. p. 109).

In association with the states' agreement to adopt professional standards for teachers and their commitment to teacher engagement with professional learning, there was a simultaneous move to mandate hours of continued professional development (CPD) to ensure registration currency.

2.2.2 Continuing professional development (CPD)

Government regulation of continuing professional development for teachers has gained increased momentum throughout the last decade not just across Australia but also globally. Countries such as The United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, The Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Scotland, and the United States of America (some states) have also embraced the promise of continuing professional development as an answer to teaching quality and student outcomes. Nonetheless, a required continuous

growth of professional knowledge and skills is an expectation of all professions (Steyn, 2010) and aligns teaching with other fields such as legal, medical, accountancy or engineering where continuing professional development has been the expectation for some time.

Whilst the introduction of continuing professional development hours has been a government-driven mandate, it has arisen from recognition of the links between effective professional learning, improved classroom practice, and enhanced student outcomes. Overseas, teachers are required to undertake varying hours of continuing professional development on an annual basis; mandated hours range between countries from as few as 15 hours in Austria through to 104 hours in Sweden. There is an interesting difference between states in Australia, also. In both New South Wales and Victoria, teachers are required to undertake 100 hours of continued professional development or learning hours on an annual basis, half of which are hours from knowledge 'outside of the school'.

Queensland teachers are only required to complete 20 hours of CPD and the composition of those hours is less rigid than counterparts in Australia and globally. The 20 hours of mandatory Continuing Professional Development in Queensland from 2013 is a reduction from 30 hours, after just three years with this expectation. The Queensland College of Teachers outlines that the Continuing Professional Development undertaken by teachers must have regard to the professional standards for Queensland teachers and demonstrate a balance across the following areas: employer directed and supported continuing professional development; school supported continuing professional development; and individually identified continuing professional development (QCT, 2012).

The designation of a balanced approach to continuing professional development is reflective of a broadened understanding of continuing professional development, and a shift from a view of it as 'short-term after school courses' (Wermke, 2011). This echoes Day's early view of continuing professional development where he foreshadowed a changed perspective from traditional pre-cast content to one where "all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which

are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit … and contribute to the quality of education in the classroom" (Day, 1997. p.4).

It is argued that the move to mandated hours of professional learning for teachers supports the value of teacher learning and teacher expertise. It also reflects accountability and reform agendas driven by the perception that the quality of teaching requires improvement (Mulcahy, 2008). The mandating of professional development and learning for teachers in response to this, establishes an influential policy lever. It allows the public sector to regulate the shape of the education marketplace (Wermke, 2012. p. 619) and influence teachers' choices in learning activities. There is an uneasy tension between an accountability, compliance agenda, and one where CPD is conceptualised as embedded in the context of the classroom, fashioned through both experience and practice in ongoing iterative cycles of strategising, planning, enacting and reflecting and where collaboration and experimentation for teachers is seen as fundamental to teachers' growth as professionals (Caena, 2011).

Irrefutably, the effectiveness of school and organisational improvement depends upon the quality of teachers (Steyn, 2010) and the way in which continuing professional development is configured, understood and practiced. Adey (2004. p.3) argues that "the continuing professional development of teachers remains the most important force in the quest for educational improvement." It is ironic, therefore, that despite the link between effective teacher professional learning and school improvement, teachers continue to complain about the irrelevance of mandated programs of professional learning, considering that such programs are of minor importance compared with informal learning by themselves and with colleagues (Clark, 2012). Mandating of hours does not ensure quality of product. In relating Continuing professional development as implemented in Hong Kong secondary schools, Lee (2011. p. 32) describes most activities as relegating teachers to the role of "passive receptacles of knowledge". Clark contends that teacher empowerment in the design and development of their formal professional development is imperative in developing likely more effective classroom teaching and therefore higher quality progress for students (p.179). The productive tension between a control or regulatory

agenda and that of individual or collective agency was of key interest to this study (Sugrue, 2011).

2.2.3 Studies in school improvement

A number of studies within Australia and globally have explored the way in which school improvement is linked to effective teacher professional learning. A South African study by Steyn (2010) drew from educators' views of a new Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) program utilising a phenomenological approach. Focus group sessions with teachers from four different schools, along with interviews of three of the principals formed the basis of the data collection. All participants agreed that if an organisation is to grow or improve, then principals need to lead the school's professional growth with enthusiasm and need to be actively engaged in professional development activities. Participants within the study concurred with a view that a top-down approach can be limiting and does not value the professionalism of staff (p. 168). There was also a view that many professional development programs had little or no impact upon their schools, and that the culture of a school would only change or be improved if all teachers, including administrators were practising the same approach or skills. Collaborative or team learning was also identified as contributing to positive change in schools (p. 173), when teachers "together frame their own learning" and work together to "investigate, challenge, and extend their current views; and then [generate new information]" (Muijs et al. 2014. p.247).

Timperley and Alton-Lee (2008), in presenting the findings of 97 empirical studies sought to identify the relationship between the kinds of teacher knowledge positively affecting outcomes for diverse learners. Their findings asserted that particular approaches to the building of professional knowledge directly affect such outcomes. They also identified that 'multidisciplinary collaborative approaches' can build appropriate professional knowledge for positive outcomes for learners. As early as 1993, The Victorian Quality Schools Project provided empirical data about school and teacher effectiveness. A key finding arising from an examination of the research data was that quality teachers and their professional development do make a difference. This difference relates to school effectiveness and student learning:

“Overall, teacher quality, measured by a range of proxy measures, has a strong and decisive impact on student outcomes” (OECD, 2001; 2005 as cited in Luke & McArdle 2009. p. 231).

To enhance school improvement, therefore, off campus professional learning activities should be accompanied by a thorough focus on follow-up activities so that the transfer of learning can be catered for more explicitly. Feedback and reflection are crucial to the process of embedding new learning into the teacher’s own context (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008; Invargson & Anderson, 2007. p. 48). The importance of the length of time of engagement at a professional learning activity is captured in a study by Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss and Shapley, (2007. p. i). In an examination of more than 1,300 studies identified as potentially addressing the effect of teacher professional development on student achievement it was found that only nine studies had a clear effect on improved student achievement. Each of these effective studies involved more than 14 hours of professional development. The most significant positive effects were evidenced through programs that offered between 30 and 100 hours spread over 6-12 months.

Research by Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009, p. 49) supports the findings of Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss and Shapley (2007). Further, their findings indicate that professional learning that does not have benefit on school improvement is that which relies on one-off workshops; episodic and fragmented learning; learning not related to teachers’ specific contexts or requirements for teachers to make changes to practice without sufficient without support. Similarly, a study by Opfer and Pedder (2011) was concerned with reasons why professional development activity does not always lead to teacher learning. They saw a need for teacher professional learning to be reconceptualised in a more complex schema and as a system, rather than as an event. (p. 378).

The relationship between active engagement in the professional learning process, better pedagogical practice and hence school improvement, was the subject of research by Adey (2004). Adey was involved as a regional consultant in developing a science curriculum in over 100 schools in remote locations such as Guyana, the Cayman Islands and Caicos. He recorded his observations of his own work as a change agent employed to professionally develop teachers in vastly different school

communities. In his role, Adey was responsible for the introduction of Science curriculum kits with associated teacher guides. He facilitated this through a series of three day in-service workshops but found that the most powerful means of professional learning and development for teachers was by going into classrooms and working alongside teachers in a mentoring role. He observed that "if you want to change what happens in schools then you need to get into schools (2004, p.9). Furthermore, he emphasised that there are no quick fixes and to change pedagogical practice is a frightening thing for teachers, hence he advocated the importance of time for 'teacher talk'. Day (1999. p. 109) also supports the importance of professional development as a means of extending classroom practice. He argues that by the definition, through the term 'professional development' this assumption is implicit.

This current study begins with the premise, then, that school improvement begins with a commitment to teacher improvement and it can be argued that this is only possible with a commitment to effective professional learning that is embedded within teacher practice, inquiry-based, reflective, and sustainable. The literature reviewed in relation to the context for school or organisational improvement indicates that increased teacher expertise and better student outcomes are part of an accountability agenda that is apparent not only in Queensland and other Australian states, but in many western-style economies. The investment of money into CPD practice and research of that practice attests to this (Lee, 2011).

Governments have seized on the importance of professional learning for teachers as a vehicle to improve both teaching and learning, since the research on school improvement shows that the quality of teaching is the most important means to improve the quality of student learning outcomes (Adey, 2004; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hattie, 2012; Luke & McArdle, 2009; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Sarason, 1990). Therefore, with a mandated government push for continued professional learning for teachers, it is an opportunity for schools to decide, with teachers, what learning is best for their teachers within their context. To do so, concurs with the balanced approach to professional learning advocated by a number of government groups, including the QCT. Yet how this is implemented within a school is open to diverse interpretation.

2.3 EXPLANATION OF KEY TERMS

In this section three key terms are explained. These are, leadership, teacher agency, and professional learning. Through further clarification of these terms beyond the introductory chapter, it is acknowledged that each term is complex, multi-layered and able to be interpreted in a diversity of ways. Through this section, a clear articulation of the parameters of the terms relevant to this study, is established.

2.3.1 Leadership

The term 'leadership' is multi-layered and its interpretation is filtered through each reader's own worldview. A singular definition of leadership is problematic because the term involves people and individuals and their somewhat unique interpretations of meaning. It cannot be defined precisely, and is likely to be contested if it is (Duignan & Hurley, 2007. p. 10). Definitions of leadership vary across a diversity of practices from top-down hierarchies to shared responsibilities among principals and teachers (Gigante & Firestone, 2007). Cardno (2008) highlights the resurgence of interest in leadership in an educational context. She suggests that leadership can best be linked with practices that improve teaching and learning. In the neo-liberal setting in which schools are placed, there is increased emphasis on principals as 'instructional' leaders with a strong interest in student data, student outcomes and the quality of teaching (Bendikson, Robinson & Hattie, 2012). However, research into the links between principal leadership and student outcomes is limited (Bendikson, Robinson & Hattie, 2012; Nir & Hameiri, 2014; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008) and indicates that principals, particularly in a secondary setting, tend to have greater indirect effect rather than direct effect on student outcomes.

Irrespective of indirect or direct effect upon student outcomes, it can be argued that within a context of rapid change, a non-linear, non-hierarchical approach to leadership is required, one that recognises the multiplicity of factors that influence student learning and school improvement. In a twenty-first century context, more 'holistic' views are apparent with a shift from the solo leader to distributed/shared/parallel leadership. (Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2009; Durrant,

2004; Fullan, 2002; Gunter, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). It was the 1990s that witnessed a real shift in the language of leadership, with principals viewed as collaborative leaders (Williams-Boyd, 2001). Sergiovanni (1999) wrote of schools as communities of practice where organisational wisdom is shared through collaborative structures that occur because teachers need to co-operate, and Duignan (1997) referred to the ethical, moral and spiritual dimensions of leadership as well as leadership as a shared, communal phenomenon (Duignan, 2006). Similarly the work of Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) focused on authentic shared leadership, rather than trait dependent. The language used by such theorists provides an interesting counterpoint to that of previous decades, although it should be noted that notions of participation in education are not new; as early as 1916, Dewey advocated strongly for participatory democracy. In essence, leadership is viewed as more humanistic, rather than autocratic and is referred to with language such as the 'soft skills' (Riggio & Tan, 2013) of leadership.

Conversely, early twentieth century theories related to scientific management theory and encompassed such trait-dependent beliefs as evidenced through the 'great man' theory (Ehrich, 2009. p. 122) whereby leaders were deemed to exhibit certain behaviours that were implicit within their character. Yet, in the twenty-first century the greatest movement has emerged from the constructivist leadership paradigm and is best seen in the push for teacher leadership, or teachers as leaders. This emergent concept is a feature of this century's educational climate (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Crowther, 2011; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003), along with an emerging interest in the effects of principals as lead learners.

Despite the recent increased focus on principals' effect upon student learning (Bendikson, Robinson & Hattie, 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Nir & Hameiri, 2014; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008) and a call for more direct instructional leadership, Buchen (2000) argues that only teachers can lead for positive difference, he describes them as the "fulcrums for change"(p.35). His view of principals is quite scathing. He believes that principals are primarily "perfunctory", "ornamental" and "bureaucratic" and that they exert limited effective leadership within the area of teacher or student learning. This contrasts with early to middle twentieth century schools that were led by principals who were variously described as the managers of

virtue, the middle managers, the heroes, ‘the great men’ and those in possession of leadership traits.

Thus twenty-first century educational leadership cannot be defined in a singular sense (Watson, 2005. p.xi). There is no formula or recipe. As noted, it is complex, multi-layered and contextual. It can be distributed, shared and tied irrevocably to the way in which learning occurs. It is a social practice and is less about the ‘must’ of being a leader and more about the meaning and activity of leading and experiencing leadership (Gunter, 2005). For the purposes of this study, leadership is seen as a fluid construct, inextricably bound to the act of leading learning and ultimately linked to the refinement and development of excellent teaching pedagogy and practice. To temper this, it is also realistically seen in association with the positional power attributed to the ‘position’ of principal. Effective school leadership is influenced by many factors. It is not owned by any individual, can be shared, can be distributed, and is best understood within its situative context. “It takes many forms, is understood in different ways and is enacted [differently] in different contexts (Cranston & Ehrich 2008. p.9). There are significant implications for both principals and teachers regarding the practices of leadership and their effect upon professional learning within a school context.

Following is a more detailed synopsis of three of many leadership types that operate within schools: principal, distributed, and teacher leadership. Whilst there are intersections in meaning between the three types, the understanding of each is important in setting the context for this study.

2.3.2 Principal leadership

In the past, educational leadership was considered the sole province of the school principal. The leadership landscape that principals traverse has changed significantly and, as a result of the changes, principals are required to lead differently and to conceive leadership in new paradigms (Cranston & Ehrich, 2008; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hahn, 2002; Riordan, 2003). From the discontinuously changing context within which principals lead, it is no longer feasible or effective to see leadership as the domain of a single ‘hero’, or even a small team of leaders. The Australian

Professional Standard for Principals clearly articulates the importance of the principal as a leader but one that cannot do so, singularly (AITSL, 2012. p.4).

Researchers indicate that it is the principal's responsibility to ensure that collective responsibility for leadership is distributed effectively or mobilised in others, with both depth and sufficient breadth (Durrant, 2004; Fullan, 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Distributed leadership tends to be embraced within the leadership literature with optimistic enthusiasm (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008), yet it is Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) view that leadership is by nature distributed within and beyond the school context. It is the quality of that distribution that is the point of contention and that quality is more likely to occur when teachers and principals explicitly privilege and value a learning culture, where participation in professional learning experiences is a clear expectation (Dinham, 2005).

A strong qualitative research base supports the view that leadership is of fundamental importance to an effective school (Sergiovanni 1984; Stoll 2004). More recent quantitative research questions the direct influence of principals upon student learning, arguing that in secondary schools, this influence is delegated to and mediated by middle managers who have greater direct influence upon the nature of pedagogy within a school context ((Bendikson, Robinson & Hattie, 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Nir & Hameiri, 2014; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). How the connection between leading and learning is interpreted reflects beliefs about both concepts. Furthermore, since leading and learning are interrelated (York-Barr & Duke, 2004) principals need to be both learners and teachers, and to demonstrate leadership in both.

An interesting duality exists nonetheless. Effective principal leadership requires a 'letting go' of authority and responsibility as teacher leadership grows, yet paradoxically, it is the principal, not the teacher, who has the greatest influence on the acceptance of teacher leadership as a viable model (Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2002; Moller and Katzenmeyer, 1996). Lambert (2005) argues that "when principals lead for sustainability, teachers and principals become more alike than different" (p. 40). The way things have been traditionally organised requires reorganisation that is endorsed and led by the principal, so that others taking up the leadership mantle, do so in a different leadership space.

This reconceptualisation of principal as a facilitative leader, and a sharer of leadership has been the focus of research work in the area of school improvement and capacity-building, by Crowther (2011). He contends that principals who are unable to share leadership are a significant impediment to school reform. Emerging from his research work across Australia in this area of whole school reform, is the term 'parallel leadership', a model of distributed leadership that highlights the role of the teacher leader and also posits a relatedness between teacher leader, and principal (Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2002). Further to this, Crowther, Ferguson and Hann proposed the five qualities of "post-industrial principalship" as "visioning, identity generation, alignment of organisational elements, distribution of power and leadership and external alliances and networking" (pp. 171-172).

At the heart of distributed leadership is a commitment to learning; principals must be lead learners as well as learners who lead others to learn, and they need to bring people with them (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005) on the learning journey. Such a concept is in direct contrast to traditional trait-based models of leadership that see it as residing within individuals. Fullan (2002) asserted that one characteristic of principals who are cultural change leaders is their willingness to create and share knowledge. Such a principal is the lead learner within a school, someone with currency who encourages research and inquiry amongst teachers.

2.3.3 Distributed leadership

It is apparent in the literature that leadership is no longer considered the sole province of the principal (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Watson, 2005; Whitty, 2011; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) For leadership of learning to occur in a sustainable way, then it needs to be distributed deliberately in an effort to genuinely share the responsibility (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006. p. 139). Whilst the principal is the fulcrum of school leadership, responsibility for the enactment of effective learning needs to be owned, shared and distributed as an action, rather than as a position. The Australian Professional Standard for Principals (2011) expounds the importance of distributed leadership stating that "leadership is distributed and collaborative with teams working together to accomplish the vision and aims of the school led by the principal" (p.2).

The proliferation of terminology associated with the distribution of leadership reflects both commonalities and differences. Of greatest interest to this study are the commonalities between the labels “cultures of collaboration” (Hargreaves, 1992); “distributed leadership” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006); “teacher leadership” (York-Barr & Duke 2004) and “parallel leadership” (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002). All of these terms are concerned with the shared alignment of the school’s vision and the school’s teaching and learning practices and construct leadership as inclusive and enabling (Day & Gu, 2014. p. 214) and as ‘action’ rather than ‘position’. This distribution of leadership, heightens sustainability of learning practices (Crowther, 2011), it develops a collective responsibility for learning (Dufour & Mattos, 2013. p. 38) and it allows those most affected by change to be engaged in a positive response to its effects (Duignan, 2006).

2.3.4 Teacher leadership

The discussion of teacher leadership as a part of the broader educational leadership construct is not well-defined nor understood in the entirety of its development or effect (York-Barr & Duke 2004). It is apparent, nonetheless, that teacher leadership exists in schools, irrespective of intent or definition. Teacher leadership is evident when teachers inspire peers, demonstrate expertise in pedagogy, content knowledge, or relationship-building and when they empower others to act. Like professional learning, teacher leadership exists in formal and informal settings and is relatively new in terms of research focus.

According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), the emergence of teacher leadership in terminology and research settings relates to reform initiatives of the 1980s. Their work is based on a comprehensive review of teacher leadership literature and is drawn from the review of 140 potential sources of which 41 were studies or reviews of studies of teacher leadership. In its linkage with a change agenda (Youitt, 2004), teacher leadership connotes potential for growth, advancement and, ultimately, in improvement in student learning outcomes. It is established within the research that for leadership to be sustained it needs to be distributed within a school context beyond the principal, to teachers, and across the community. Whilst theorists and researchers argue differently about the role of the principal in facilitating teacher

leadership, it is apparent that without principal support, teacher leadership will not be viable. Buchen (2000. p. 35) states that only teachers can lead for positive difference; he describes them as the “fulcrums for change”. Yet as stated previously, without the enabling of principals, teacher leadership is unlikely to occur. Thus, principal leadership is an enabler of teacher leadership.

As evidence of the importance of teachers as leaders, the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers Framework has established four career stages of teachers: graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead. The latter and ‘highest’ category acknowledges the role of teacher leaders who are recognised as exemplary teachers and practitioners by colleagues, students, parents and community members. They are required to lead teaching and learning practices in ways that inspire colleagues to improve their own professional practice. This is evidence of a shift from an historical perspective where teachers were socialised as followers, rather than leaders (Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996).

The other shift that is required is about the detribalisation of classroom practice and a movement from isolation to collaboration, or independence to interdependence (Searby & Shaddix, 2008. p. 5). Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) argue that relationships come first, culture second (Fullan, 1993) and structure third and that to develop one in isolation is dangerous practice. Relationships support the possibility of risk-taking, challenging the known, and a healthy culture supports the resistance that is almost inevitable (Loader, 1997). Finally, structures support the processes and when grounded in theory, allow for sustainability. Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) urge that “space” needs to be provided within the school day, otherwise forcing teachers into renegotiating thinking about teaching and learning, becomes a punishment rather than a productive process.

This current study had an interest in teacher leadership of teacher professional learning in a school context. It is argued that teachers who lead can make a positive difference in the schools in which they operate in a diversity of ways. It is argued that conditions within a school can affect the agency teachers have within their own learning and leadership and it was this complex interplay of factors that was the focus of the research.

2.3.5 Teacher agency

As it relates to education, teacher agency can be viewed as teachers being empowered to act, exercising choice, being participants, being active in affecting change, believing in their ability to make a difference (Frost & Durrant, 2004). In its most positive sense, teacher agency generates knowledge and ideas that contribute to better teaching practice. Teacher agency can also be equated with the notion of being an 'active professional' (Sachs, 2003), or part of the body of 'new professionalism' (Hargreaves, 1994), or it can relate to the 'professional autonomy' described by Forrester (2000), or simply as the individual capacity to take intentional action (Burridge, Carpenter, Cherednichenko & Kruger, 2010). Hattie (2012. p.86) draws an analogy between an activator, "an enzyme or a protein that increases the production of a gene product in DNA transcription" and the major role of the teacher as a change agent, exercising "action, agency and augmentation." A growing body of work around practitioner research and practitioner enquiry is also aligned with the engagement and emancipatory knowledge about practice that tends to evolve when agency is activated (Campbell & McNamara, 2010. p.14).

Likewise, teacher agency can be defined as a professional and interpersonal quality or capacity to exert leadership (O'Brien, 2006). This aligns with Turnbull's definition of professional agency, that of 'the capacity of the professional educator to effectively apply appropriate professional knowledge, skills and understandings, and dispositions in professional practice contexts' (cited in Turnbull 2005. p. 207). All of these characteristics are of importance and relevant to understanding teacher agency. It is not merely the capacity to resist, but also choosing to act otherwise (Sloan, 2006. p. 123).

Dietz and Burns (1992) envisage agency as a continuous rather than a categorical property influenced by context and increased through teacher expertise and with an increase in expertise the individual becomes self-reflective and hence can self-direct or self-regulate in positive and powerful ways. They also identify constraints to agency including the structure of rules that may restrict action; and the agency of others when they influence others to negatively sanction against activity.

The evolutionary approach to the study of culture and institutions undertaken by Dietz and Burns (1992) emphasises the dynamic interplay between actor and his or her context. The concept of an individual exerting influence and facilitating a preferred future within their classroom or work environment is described by Fullan (1993) as “change agentry”. This sense of the individual learning, affecting and improving their own performance is important to consider if professional learning experiences are to be organised effectively. Action depends on the capability of the individual to “make a difference”, that is, to exercise some sort of power (Giddens, 1984).

In seeking a definition, the work of Giddens (1984), a social theorist, is acknowledged. Whilst his theory of agency is drawn from a broader social rather than a specific educational context, there are some transferable principles. Much of the discussion about agency within an educational context centres on the positive; it speaks of choice, activism, professionalism and generation of new ideas and practices. Giddens’ work reveals the complexities of enabling and constraining structures and suggests that agency is not a singular concept but one inextricably bound to the social structures [school structures] within which it exists.

Further to this, the work of Logan and Dempster (1992) regarding agency is relevant. Their work in the area of professional learning explores the dichotomy between ‘people as subjects’ and ‘people as objects’ and has its roots in the writings of social theorists Burrell and Morgan who focus on the distinction between objective and subjective realities (Logan & Dempster, 1992). Logan and Dempster’s model of developmental directions in approaches to in-service education are discussed in more detail, along with other professional learning models, towards the end of this chapter.

Teacher agency is simultaneously enabling and constraining. It is about teachers exercising choice and the flexibility of teachers in making interpretations (Dietz & Burns, 1992); it is often visible in the way in which teachers teach and lead within a school; it is about teachers engaging reflectively and deploying power to make a difference and, in so doing, affecting the structures and cultural fabric of a school. As such, it is part of the broader picture of Fullan’s (1993) “change agentry”. Of interest in this study, therefore, are the structures that enable or constrain teacher agency

within teacher professional learning. These structures and conditions are discussed in a future section of the literature review.

For the purposes of this review, teacher agency is defined as teachers having the opportunity to choose and engage in professional learning activities that lead to a change in school and classroom practice.

2.3.6 Professional learning

> We have deliberately selected the term professional learning over the more narrow conceptual terms of professional development or professional learning communities because breakthrough means focused, on-going learning for each and every teacher.
> (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2009. p. 80)

That teachers need to engage in continuing learning and development is not contested. What could be an area of contestation, however, is the different terminology of professional development and professional learning and the implications of that difference. This section seeks to clarify the way in which these terms are treated within the context of this chapter and this study. In clarifying the definitions of professional learning and development in schools, an approach is established that will assist in understanding the connections between the terms teacher agency, school improvement, principals and teacher leadership.

It is argued that there has been a shift in terminology within the literature and the research associated with the areas of professional development and learning in the past two decades (Kriewaldt, 2008). It is further evident that the terms are often used interchangeably and with overlapping meaning and, as Gore, Williams and Ladwig (2006) point out, are often poorly defined. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009. p. 56) identify the difference in terminology as being far more significant than a semantic or cosmetic one, identifying it is a reflection of an ‘espoused orientation’ towards teacher learning. What is apparent within the literature is an understanding that teachers need to learn, and ‘development’ is not enough (Brown-Easton, 2008).

For the purposes of this research, the term professional learning rather than professional development is preferred. It is argued that professional learning is

concerned with a process over time, one that is not packaged or counted in terms of hours and is a process that privileges knowledge production over knowledge consumption (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009). The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) refers to "continuing professional development" rather than "continuing professional learning"; this may be reflective of a top-down, rather than bottom-up view of learning.

The interchangeability of the terminology is simple to do but is also laden with meaning. Mockler (2013) identifies the buzz word marketable nature of "professional learning" in the 21st century, arguing that many professional development providers have simply exchanged one lot of terminology for another without any change in delivery or understanding of difference in meaning between the two terms (p. 36). Furthermore she highlights the irony that professional learning is the outcome of "professional development activities" which are measured in hours of participation and valued because they can be easily documented and demonstrated as evidence (p. 39). It is, in her view, reflective of a subtle change in emphasis from teaching quality to teacher quality.

A preference for the term professional learning within this study emerges from the belief that reconceptualisation of the way in which teacher learning can be grown, sustained and built upon, is fundamental to organisational improvement. The choice of professional learning rather than professional development allows scope for a broader view of learning, viewing it as on-going, differing between personal, planned and opportunistic, and being flexible in nature (Day, 1999; Craft, 2000). In this study it is viewed within the broader context of leadership, school culture and school improvement because professional learning for teachers is shaped significantly by the context in which each teacher practises.

To clarify further, Casey (2013) describes professional development as something that is "done to teachers", in England this originally occurred through INSET days, and now, through certificated upskilling via discreet one-day courses which have become the norm (p.79). This compartmentalisation of knowledge constitutes teachers as recipients rather than producers of knowledge and sits in contradiction to the type of professional learning concerned with "the diverse ways in which teachers construct their knowledge and develop their skills" (Parr, 2004, as cited in Kriewaldt,

2008. p.3). Hence, professional learning refers to progress and increased control over one's professional behaviour (Imants, 2002). Professional learning conjures a greater sense of expansive, sustained learning that is constructed through critical reflection, and active engagement in the research of practice.

The difference between CPD that builds upon a professional learning perspective and that draws on the more traditional professional development that is 'done' to teachers, is evident in a seven-year insider practitioner research study based upon the experiences of a Physical Education teacher in England conducted by Casey (2013). He reflected upon his CPD during his first seven years a as a teacher and, in doing so, explored what he perceived as two parallel discourses around CPD; the "talked about (in literature and between interested professionals) and the actioned (that experienced by teachers)" (p.79).

His study compared the effects of the standardised CPD he undertook during that time, upon his teaching and learning against that gleaned in his role as a reflective practitioner who selected and sought out his own individual professional learning community, one which was flexible, accessible and free. This underscores the irony of schools readily funding and facilitating expensive courses "almost completely unrelated to teaching and pedagogical practice" (p.84) whilst the practitioner research-orientated CPD he undertook as part of a Masters' degree program was concentrated entirely on pedagogical and curricular change (p. 84). CPD sits within the push and pull tension of accountability and learning growth, where bureaucracy potentially erodes agency and hence the type of learning that can transform practice within the classroom. For professional learning to occur as has been explored within this study, then the teacher needs to be constituted within that 'learning' as an agent, rather than an object requiring 'development'.

Yet, a number of studies (Bolam, 2000; Hustler, McNamara, Jarvis, Londra, Campbell & Howson, 2003) indicate that teachers still define CPD conservatively and associate it primarily with attendance at courses, seminars or workshops. They tend to see it as something done 'to' them, rather than something of which they are an integral part. Yet for sustained personal professional growth, as well as for positive organisational growth, it is authentic learning (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) that is appropriate from a context-sensitive perspective (McWilliam, 2002) that needs

focus. Furthermore, the prevalence of commodified professional learning identified as CPD by many teachers, which often is not translated into practice in the school context, diminishes the impact and sustainability of learning.

The potential richness of teacher professional learning lies in the opportunities for it to occur in both incidental and planned ways. From classrooms to development courses, mentoring, action research, peer coaching, workshops, professional reading through to incidental hallway conversations with colleagues (Putnam & Borko as cited in Borko, 2004), professional learning is ubiquitous in school contexts. It is incumbent upon those who have a leading role in the professional learning of teachers to ensure that it is encouraged widely within the school. Furthermore, for teacher learning to be effective, professional learning strategies must achieve a balance between a shared vision and autonomy to individuals. It is not enough for approaches to teacher professional learning to be shared in an *ad hoc* fashion as Groundwater-Smith (2005), cautions that "not all learning is good learning – one may learn to survive rather than professionally thrive" (p.20).

In other words, professional development has been tied historically, and perhaps erroneously, to traditional ways of 'doing' teacher learning that is, formal, mandatory, structured and regulated. It somehow connotes a "drive-by or spray-on" (Mockler, 2005 as cited in Groundwater-Smith & Mockler 2009. p.55) approach to knowledge enhancement, or is seen as deficit-filling with a clear absence of participant agency. While, according to Sachs (2003), the more recent shift to the terminology of professional learning brings with it notions of collaboration, participation, learning, co-operation, agency and activism. It moves beyond old views of professional development and learning as passive absorption of knowledge and the alleviation of a deficit, to an activist element where the teacher takes responsibility for their own learning, the discussion of which was explored in the previous section. Ultimately this study focused on the ways in which teacher professional learning could be encouraged, facilitated and organised within one school site in Queensland.

2.3.7 Principles of effective teacher professional learning

The Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training Professional Learning Policy of 2009 identified a diversity of inter-related principles of effective professional learning; the learning should be evidenced-based, differentiated, exemplary, contextually relevant, personalised and appropriate for adult learners (2009. p.3). Additionally, The National Mapping of Teacher Professional Learning Project Report of 2008 provided a comprehensive picture of teacher learning practices across Australia, based upon the premise that professional learning is fundamental to an educational change agenda and integral to development of quality teaching practices. The key findings of the report show that effective teacher professional learning is a key way to implement reform at both a system wide and school level. Further, it is integral to the professional lives of teachers and not an add on; it is dynamic, collaborative and generative; grounded in local school communities and comprised of practitioner inquiry which is strongly collegial and collaborative in nature.

The report also highlighted the need for access to high quality and relevant professional learning at every stage of a teacher's teaching life, and not just as an extra. It captured a commitment to the principles of life-long learning for teachers, "active professionals" (Sachs, 2003), liberated by their engagement in learning in its broadest sense. It gives support to collaborative practice and the place of practitioner enquiry. It also reflects findings from previous reports such as the 2003 report by the Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education (Australia), 'Australia's teachers: Australia's future: advancing innovation, science, technology and mathematics: background data and analysis' that indicated an interesting paradox: whilst mandated professional standards for teachers have been centralised at a state government level, decisions about the nature, organisation and delivery of professional learning activities have increasingly become the responsibility of individual schools. This reflects the paradox inherent in neo-liberalism, that the teaching profession is 'liberated' in autonomy whilst increasingly accountable to meet standards (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Servage, 2013).

2.4 PROCESSES THAT SUPPORT TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

This third section of the literature review outlines key mechanisms and conditions that researchers have identified as fundamental to support effective professional learning in a school context. These include willingness of the school to undertake change in order to facilitate improvement in practice through:

- teacher agency evident through practitioner-led research and a culture of reflective practice;
- a collaborative approach to teacher learning underpinned by a model of distributed school leadership; and
- principal leadership of learning through example and by capacity-building

The unifying thread within these three mechanisms is teacher agency or teacher choice and allocated time and space for this activity to be practised. How agency is grown draws from the way in which teacher collaboration and principal leadership are enacted and these two mechanisms are also discussed.

2.4.1 Teacher agency

Teacher agency is a critical factor in fostering teacher leadership and hence contributing to a broader learning culture within a school context. Therefore, when teachers become agents in their own learning, they are more likely to provide leadership to others. Both agency and leadership are processes that inform each other's practice (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009). Where teachers experience agency to lead within their professional learning practice (O'Brien, 2006) it is argued that there is greater scope for growth and development, because ownership of, and responsibility for one's learning, are fundamental to its value to the learner. According to Darling-Hammond and Richardson, (2009. p. 49) "active learning opportunities allow teachers to transform their teaching." Implicit in their thinking, is that teacher engagement with agency is fundamental to improvement in practice. Menter and Hulme (2010, p. 111) in stressing the values of teachers choosing their learning focus, remark that "when teachers participate in research in an elective activity, there is the potential for research engagement to open up new spaces for teacher agency."

Much has been written recently about the ways in which schools can support, in explicit and measured ways, teachers' professional learning and to broaden their own understanding of the essential concepts that create effective teacher professional learning conditions. Yet, since professional learning is a complex construct (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002) its components need to be carefully considered for the benefits of best practice and school improvement. This seems to be the case, particularly in the paradoxical situation where autonomy and regulation are simultaneous concepts; or where tension exists between the duality of constraint and enablement. Formal leaders in schools face the considerable challenge of organising learning for their teachers in a way that honours their school's values and mission whilst challenging and supporting the individual needs of staff in a way that promotes, rather than hinders agency. Furthermore, they tread the uneasy path between adhering to a compliance agenda whilst seeking to enable teachers to exert choice and control within their learning.

As evidence of the benefits of teacher agency in their own learning is Lee's (2011) study, which was conducted to determine the ways in which English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' active participation as presenters in CPD seminars would promote more effective teacher learning. Lee drew from questionnaire and email interview data from 166 seminar participants and 4 teacher presenters. To collect the data, Lee first presented a CPD seminar on feedback in writing at a Hong Kong university. The aim of the seminar was to assist teachers to think differently about approaches to the provision of feedback to students in relation to written work. The seminar itself was structured in three parts including a 45 minute presentation of ten perspectives to assist teachers to critique conventional feedback approaches. This was followed by consideration of pre-, during- and post feedback stages. A 40 minute panel presentation followed with a diversity of experts discussing approaches to feedback. The final section of the seminar was devoted to questions and answers between seminar participants, panellists and the researcher/presenter.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected following the seminar from two data sources. The first, in the form of a participant questionnaire whish sought feedback regarding what they liked most and least about the seminar. Further to this, an individual email interview with teacher presenters sought views and perceptions

about their participation in the panel session. The data indicated that teacher participants placed importance and value upon relevance of ideas shared in the seminar, and appreciated the non-traditional structure of the seminar which mirrored a professional learning community on a micro scale, and provided opportunity for professional sharing and exchange. The teacher panellists remarked that the structure of their part in the seminar, including the preparatory meeting held the week before, allowed for knowledge generation, rather than knowledge consumption. According to Lee, the findings showed that "teachers' involvement in the seminar transformed them from their normal submissive role as passive recipients of knowledge into active producers of knowledge" (p.37).

This study supports a view that teachers' professional learning is enhanced when teachers engage actively in their learning, are creators rather than consumers, and that engagement in communities of practice is empowering, enriching and more likely to lead to sustained change in pedagogy within the classroom. An English qualitative study undertaken by Day and Gu (2010) drew from the stories of teachers who they identified and categorised at different 'career phases', finding that professional learning needs of teachers vary according to their sense of agency, resilience and commitment. Therefore professional learning needs to be tailored to the 'phase' needs of teachers, rather than generically assuming that agency can be 'applied' or automatically assumed whenever learning experiences allow teachers active engagement in their learning. Identification of teachers' career phase needs requires intuitive and attentive leadership.

A study conducted in the Netherlands, researchers Ketelaar, Koopman, Den Brok, Beijaard and Boshuizen (2014) looked at the way in which teachers familiarise themselves with new pedagogy, namely 'coaching' students, in everyday practice and the role of ownership, sense-making and agency within that learning. Eleven teachers from two schools participated in the study. Data were collected through digital logs in which the teachers recorded their learning experiences in narrative form, in response to several questions. This occurred over a nine month period, approximately once every two months. Each of the teachers reported 'agency' within their learning experiences, agency tended to be equated with action or activity and tended to occur spontaneously, rather than in relation to a planned experience. Most

of the learning experiences where agency was expressed, contributed to learning goals that teachers had set at the beginning of the study (p. 327).

Just as the work of Day and Gu (2010) which identified ‘career phases’ of teachers and, resultantly, showed that different career phases require different approaches to professional learning, Ketelaar, Koopman, Den Brok, Beijaard and Boshuizen (2014) proposed that teachers’ positioning or readiness to implement the change affected their initial sense of agency, ownership and sense-making (p.334) and ultimately the success, or otherwise, of the learning experience. The studies by Day and Gu (2010) and Ketelaar, Koopman, Den Brok, Beijaard and Boshuizen (2014) indicate that the individual needs of teachers ultimately affect the relevance of the learning experience and the degree to which agency is utilised to enhance or resist that experience (Ketelaar, Koopman, Den Brok, Beijaard & Boshuizen, 2014. p. 335). To heighten teacher agency in learning, principals or leaders who construct mechanisms of support, need to be aware of teacher readiness for learning.

The importance of relational support from colleagues and the ability to be critically reflective about practice are two factors that support teacher agency, according to Turnbull (2005) who studied the practices of six pre-service early childhood teachers on practicum in pre-school settings in New Zealand. Through semi-structured interviews with the pre-service teachers, their supervising teachers, and their visiting lecturers, Turnbull’s qualitative case study found that the exercise of teacher agency occurred with only half of those studied. Inhibitors such as the absence of teacher support, a rift in philosophical understandings about education, a “line” between teacher and pre-service teacher which reduced interaction and professional dialogue, as well as a lack of clear modelling by the supervising teacher, were identified through the study. Similar to Day and Gu’s (2010) study, it was apparent that each pre-service teacher’s view of themselves within this beginning career phase affected the way in which they experienced professional agency during their practicum. Coupled with this were external factors beyond their control, such as their supervising teachers’ own career phase as well as the practicum setting. The study highlights the notion that teacher agency can be heightened when particular structures are in place, including an individual’s own sense of professional identity within their own career phase.

Individual autonomy, therefore, plays a role in the application of agency in learning. Forrestor (2000) conducted qualitative research in England, into the relationship between primary teachers' professional autonomy and the increasing managerial control of their work. She collected data in the form of classroom observations; informal and semi-structured interviews with five teachers; governors/parents meetings; and informal conversations with staff. Forrestor sought to uncover the way in which teachers make sense of the tensions between professional autonomy and managerial expectations. It was found, that whilst teachers agree with moves to improve the quality of teaching and learning, lack of consultation and a heavy managerialist approach "from the top" caused high levels of anxiety and demoralisation amongst them (p. 149).

In considering the effects of managerialism, Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald and Bell (2005) conducted a case study in a Queensland school that focused on the effect that defining professional standards for teachers might have upon "guiding, extending and recognising their professional learning" (p. 176). Their research indicated that engaging teachers in the deconstruction of their own professional practice enhanced those same teachers' professional practice. Giddens (1984) would classify this as an application of discursive consciousness and an example of high level agency within the learning process. In the Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald and Bell study (2005), data were collected through focus group reports based on observation and interview as well as site visits and survey analysis. There was general agreement by the participants that professional standards were relevant to both "their classroom teaching practice and themselves as professionals" (Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald & Bell, 2005. p.166) and teachers agreed strongly that "the standards should be used to support professional learning" (Mayer Mitchell, Macdonald & Bell 2005. p.166). Through engaging teachers in reflective learning about their own practice, teachers were able to exercise agency and hence experience efficacy within the process, despite the potential for professional standards to be viewed as bureaucratic and regulatory.

In extending discussion around teacher agency and involvement in such learning, Sergiovanni (1992) stresses the importance of those affected by decisions, being

invited to participate in the shaping of those decisions. Riveros, Newton & Burgess, (2012. p. 209) argue for a situative perspective of agency which means that agency must be conceived within the contexts of practice in which teachers participate. Agency is connected to the school culture, its practices and its organisation, and its presence is heightened or weakened by the way a school operates. Effective teacher professional learning then is inextricably linked to teacher agency or activism within that process (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008; Invargson & Anderson, 2007; Sachs, 2003) and this in turn is fostered through a complementary leadership structure, one that fosters the collaborative rather than the hierarchical.

2.4.2 A collaborative approach to teacher learning

> Quality teaching is not an individual accomplishment, it is the result of a collaborative culture that empowers teachers to team up to improve student learning beyond what any of them can achieve alone. (Carroll 2009. p. 13)

The emergent term professional learning (Craft, 2000; Day, 1999; Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2009; Kriewaldt, 2008) brings with it greater emphasis on teacher participation as leaders, collaborators and researchers. Collaboration in teacher research has been credited with many quality outcomes, including the development of teachers as researchers (Lassonde, Israel & Almasi, 2009. p. 9), with this notion of teacher learning as inquiry linking with the earlier work social theorists and constructivists, Dewey (1916), Freire (1994), and Vygotsky (1978) who were intensely interested in the intersection between theory and practice in an educational setting. In a study by Barber and Mourshed (2007) the best school systems in the world were those that focused on providing "high-quality, collaborative, job-focused professional development" (p. 30) for their teachers. Further to this, the opportunity to collaborate has been cited as the most important factor in instituting change. Riveros, Newton & Burgess (2012. p. 204), "conclude that school-based peer collaboration is one among many possible ways in which teachers can learn about their profession, exercise their agency in the school settings, and therefore contribute to the educational success of their students." Yet collaboration itself does not lead to improvement of teaching practices or student learning. Opfer and Pedder (2011) in their literature review analysis of teacher professional learning, provide an interesting view of collaboration, proposing that "too much collaboration and learning are

stifling" and that "all teachers in a school may vary in the amount of collaboration necessary for change" (p. 386).

Du Four (2011) reminds us also that encouraging teachers to collaborate is not enough, rather the "embedding [of] professional collaboration in the routine practice of the school" (p.47) is a necessity. He describes the reality of many schools as places where teachers work in isolation from one another, where classrooms are personal domains, and teachers have limited access to the ideas or strategies of their colleagues. The powerful status quo of many schools earmarked by privacy, teacher self-serving autonomy, and lack of collaboration, are, according to Du Four (2011), a direct by-product of schools that offer no infrastructure support for collective discussion.

Similarly, Fiszer (2004) discusses the paradigm shift needed within schools for professional learning to move from teacher isolation to teacher collaboration. He views this as essential to the development of a shared purpose. Tuohy (1999) concurs that professional development cannot be a private action if it is to bring about sustained personal growth; it needs to be collaborative and shared with others. Effective collaboration does not occur simply by teachers spending time together in group learning situations. It requires a change in "deeply rooted norms, cultures and practices" which are based upon trust which allows for shared risk-taking, as well as deep, continuous interest in learning (Caena, 2001. p. 10). Further to the notion of collaboration, it is argued that change, at deeper sustained levels involves the modification or transformation of values, attitudes, emotions and perceptions that inform practice. Change is unlikely to occur unless there is teacher agency evident through a sense of ownership of the decision-making change process (Day, 1999) and unless it is shared.

In her teacher participatory action research, Cloonan (2008) delineated between diffusion-adoption professional learning models that position teachers as objects and compliant technicians of policy and practices. Her research project was an investigation into the professional learning of four teachers of early years (Prep - Year 4) students, conducted in the Victorian government school sector during 2003. Her study sought insights into teachers' pedagogical choices as a result of collaborative engagement in the development of resources to support classroom

based multiliteracies pedagogical understandings. The collaboration itself was not just about working together. It was strengthened during the process by the assistance of experts in the multiliteracy field as theory was discussed, then when mentors and experts assisted in workshopping the resources. Reflective action planning was also utilised as the classroom applications were developed. The teachers problem-solved, planned, shared and discussed approaches. Data were collected over eight months and involved the filming of sixty-two lessons to observe the way in which their collaboration looked in practice. The film artefacts allowed for further collaborative reflection on the success of the implementation of the classroom applications (pp. 9-11).

Cloonan's work places emphasis on collaborative teacher agency within the professional learning process where she explored the significance of co-researching models of professional learning that hold the potential to engage teachers and researchers in explorations of mutual concern. It was argued in a previous section that teacher agency is fundamental to a dynamic process of professional learning. Accordingly, delivery modes that place the teacher within the action authentically, situatively, and with sensitivity to context, are much more likely to see continued, positive effect within the classroom (McWilliam, 2002). It is argued that the "research-engaged" school (Ebbutt, 2002) that supports a "culture of inquiry" (Fullan, 2007) will grow a learning community (DuFour, 2011).

Another Victorian study which ran between 2008-2011 was also concerned with an expansion of teachers' pedagogical understanding through collaboration. The case study undertaken by Burridge and Carpenter (2013) investigated the effectiveness of a joint collaboration between a Victorian Department High School and a non-government organisation, *Evolve* that works with at-risk young people. *Evolve* had delivered an education and leadership program to Year 9 students over three years seeking the achievement of two aims: student personal growth and development of inquiry learning (p. 10). Concurrently, Burridge and Carpenter's study sought to understand the program's influence on teacher professional learning. Data were collected through field observation and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, teachers, *Evolve* staff, and parents and provided an understanding of the program from a range of perspectives. Four

teachers and two Evolve staff involved as co-ordinators within the program were interviewed two to three times each year over the course of its implementation. It was found that the collaboration around curriculum implementation fostered a reflective discussion of teaching (pp. 22-23) as the Evolve staff and teachers worked together on matters of student learning. Through this collaboration, teachers were able to articulate their development of new pedagogical perspectives on student learning (p. 23). Their professional learning experience throughout the course of the program led to a changed view of their work.

An older study, of teacher perceptions of best practices in professional development conducted by Crowther and Gaffney (1994) explored the perceptions of a representative group of primary and secondary teachers across Australia regarding their preferences for projects to be established under the National Professional Development Program (NPDP). Eighteen professional associations with links to the designated national priorities nominated specialist teachers in each state and territory to participate in one-day focus group seminars. Of the six questions that were addressed by each focus group of particular relevance was: What are teachers′ perceptions of best practices in professional development? Thirty factors were identified as important, indicating the intricacies of effective professional learning. The data indicated that old methods based upon deficit models were no longer considered relevant. The common thread was a belief that teachers need to be able to have agency or decision-making in their learning, whether as individuals, collaborative groups or as a profession. This was deemed of much greater importance than structured training programmes (Crowther & Gaffney, 1994). Furthermore, it was highlighted that school administrators play a critical role in facilitating best practices in professional development within schools. Collaboration between school leaders and teachers is of fundamental importance to effective teaching and learning.

Building upon the findings of this earlier study, Crowther was the key innovator (2001) of a school improvement process titled the IDEAS (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools) project that has been implemented in over 300 schools internationally. This longitudinal approach to the embedding of a collaborative, school-wide professional learning strategy, works on a five phase, three to four year process of revitalisation or school improvement. The project

constructs parallel leadership structures between principal and teachers; establishes a framework for organisational alignment as well as a framework for expert pedagogical practice (Crowther, 2011. p. 19).

A study of 19 of the Australian schools that implemented the program between 2004 and 2008 sought to understand any changes to school outcomes that could be attributed to engagement in the project. Within 17 of the 19 schools significant improvements were noted in teacher morale, teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of their pedagogy, student engagement and student perceptions of the efficacy of their teachers' pedagogical strategies (p. 19-20). The research team also explored the leadership constructs that functioned within these schools. The findings indicated that parallel leadership matures with school improvement;
the way in which middle managers practice leadership is critical to the success of parallel leadership; professional conceptualisations of teacher leadership and principal leadership need to include capacity-building functions and leadership functions of principal and teacher leaders vary according to individual capacity-building dynamics (p.21).

Inherent in the notion of a collaborative approach for teacher learning is a non-hierarchical or distributed model of leadership, or Crowther's parallel leadership. Despite difficulties inherent in distributed leadership in some circumstances, the value of non-hierarchical or distributed leadership (Durrant, 2004; Fullan, 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) or leadership that operates in new paradigms (Cranston & Ehrich, 2008; Crowther, 2011; Riordan, 2003) is that it enables teachers to lead within their classrooms and as learners, and thus contribute collectively and collaboratively to school improvement. Whitty (2009) in his foreword to Robinson and Timperley's book *Leadership and Learning*, states that to expect one person to lead learning in a large school is no longer feasible or realistic. He writes that "while some may not sign up to the label 'distributed leadership', it is undoubtedly the case that driving improvement is now beyond the scope of a single individual, particularly in a large secondary school" (p.xii).

MacBeath and Dempster (2009) also advocate for a leadership model that fosters distribution of leadership and learning and hence collaboration between teachers.

They emphasise that no one person holds all of the wisdom and that leadership and learning need to occur together, or collaboratively, in order for that wisdom to be shared and grown. Importantly, then, the effectiveness of teacher teams and collaborative partnerships cannot be contrived (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, Wallace, & et al., 2005) and teacher agency within the collaborative process must be authentic and liberating if the process is to yield optimal results. It is acknowledged that leadership structures within schools can both hinder and support the growth of an effective professional learning culture.

2.4.3 Principal leadership of teacher professional learning

How teachers learn within a school links directly with how their principal or lead learners learn, and lead that learning. More so, principals require personal and organisational traits (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2006; Lambert, 2004) that support teacher learning rather than direct it from top-down (Van Driel, Beijard & Verloop, 2001 cited in Groves & Wallace, 2007). Principals, according to Bredeson (2003) have a large responsibility for the way in which professional learning is enacted within a school, with influence needed in their positive advocacy for professional learning; being a model learner; allocating resources and other support structures; and, by challenging, stimulating and deepening their colleagues commitment to high-quality professional practice (p. 74). Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) pose an interesting question in their reflection on the professional learning needs of principals. How can principals lead professional learning for their teachers if they do not know their own learning needs?

Whilst principals may have knowledge of their own learning needs, they are also responsible for creating a supportive infrastructure that enables, enriches and extends learning opportunities for teachers (Livingston, 2014) so that they too have insight into their learning requirements. The literature supports a view that teachers benefit from regular engagement with colleagues in enquiry, reflection and analysis to and improve learning and teaching in relation to their own students' learning needs (Caena, 2001; Day, 1999; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Livingston, 2014). For this to occur requires that principals understand the learning needs of their teachers and the ability to put effective support structures in place to enable that learning (Bishop, 2011; Crowther, 2011; Livingston, 2014).

Research conducted by Brookhart and Moss (2013) on behalf of the Centre for Advancing the Study of Teaching and Learning, Duquesne University, looked at the role of school administrators in leading professional development for teachers on the subject of formative assessment processes. The qualitative study involved principals from 12 schools in rural Pennsylvania. During 2009 to 2010, principals met on a monthly basis with the researchers. Part of the principal's methodology involved observing teacher classroom practice and providing effective feedback to teachers. What became obvious to the researchers over time was that the project became less about formative assessment practices and more about the effectiveness of the principal as lead learner. Brookhart and Moss (2013) noted that principals who viewed themselves as learners were best able to lead a positive shift in the culture of learning in the school. In comparison, principals who did not see themselves as learners, but as supervisors, imbued an evaluative culture (p.14).

Since sustainability of learning through capacity-building in teachers is a role of leadership, (Crowther, 2011) principals need to be lead learners, and also need to provide structures which enable teachers to lead learning and therefore heighten teacher agency within the learning process. Principals' influence is substantial (Bredeson, 2003) as it affects the learning culture of the school, the way in which teachers perceive their role as learners and therefore has potential for school improvement.

The processes that support effective teacher professional learning can be defined as being: in-depth, job embedded, ongoing, content focussed, collaborative, and encouraging of reflective thinking (Clark, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Newmann, Youngs, Groves & King, 2000). Research work undertaken by Clark (2011) and others through the Centre for the Study of Education and Work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto involved surveying and interviewing of classroom teachers for over 15 years. Their studies confirm from teacher input that "learning from single events such as professional development day workshops is inferior to ongoing, job-embedded, self-chosen professional learning, including informal learning from colleagues" (p.183). These strategies place the teacher and their craft firmly within the action, thus identifying

teacher agency and teacher collaboration as important complementary components of professional learning which require principals to recognise and support.

What is apparent in the literature is that there is significant and often untapped teacher learning in existence within classrooms and individual schools with enormous potential for teachers to learn from one another by observing, critiquing and giving feedback regarding practice. It is important that professional learning is not tied to deficit models where gaps are filled; rather it can and should involve a deliberately planned approach to collaborative professional learning, linked to school development goals and engage teachers as agents of their own learning. The central tenet of work by Australian academic practitioners Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) in the area of professional learning highlights the importance of a collaborative, inquiry-based focus that also meets and challenges the requirements of a compliance-driven agenda.

The following section outlines the theoretical framework on which the research related to teacher agency and professional learning was explored. It addresses the way in which the concepts of professional learning for school improvement, leadership involving both principal and teacher, and teacher agency intersect and interrelate.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Previous discussion in this chapter explored the relationship between teacher agency and teacher professional learning within the context of school improvement. It is argued that effective professional learning for teachers is connected to improved classroom practice and that this may lead to improved student learning outcomes. For this reason, a study of the way in which professional learning is structured and how it relates to teacher agency is worthy of further investigation.

In developing a theoretical framework for this study, the seminal ideas of Logan and Dempster (1992) were reviewed since they provide a conceptual model for understanding in-service education, an allied term to professional learning. The central tenet of their model (see Figure 3) is the view that in-service education can involve teachers-as-objects or teachers-as-subjects in the process of professional

learning. Their argument centres on a belief that all quadrants of their 'Four orientations to in-service education' model contribute to the complexity of learning required for a professional teacher. Furthermore, they acknowledge the diversity of approaches required from mandated initiatives that principals are duty-bound to implement, usually from a top-down, didactic methodology, to those modes which focus upon reconstructive approaches to the way in which teachers enact their professionalism.

For the purposes of this study their work is considered in conjunction with that of Crowther who has worked with other researchers, including Kaagan, Hann, Ferguson and McMaster over the past two decades focusing on a whole school reform agenda that has placed emphasis on teachers as leaders and the place of principals as enablers or hinderers of that activity. Crowther (2011) further extrapolates this to identify the clear link between distributed leadership involving teachers as primary leaders and successful school improvement.

Whilst the approaches of Logan and Dempster, and Crowther are divergent in detail and approach, it is their common thread of 'teachers as subjects' that was of interest to this study. It is argued that it is in the 'space' where teachers are constituted as agents and as leaders that the effects of professional learning will affect and sustain organisational improvement. The common ground between Logan and Dempster, and Crowther exists within the area of reconstruction, rather than reproduction, and a constructivist, rather than positivist, worldview.

Though the focus is on the shared interest in reconstruction, it is valid to first look at Logan and Dempster's full model and their contention that all four quadrants contribute to the whole picture of professional learning for teachers. At times, teachers will be objects for whom information is delivered and at other times they will be subjects with increased agency within the process. Their argument emerges from a belief that a concentration on a single approach is restrictive, therefore they advocate the need for an eclectic approach to planning and operationalising in-service education that values a diversity of learning experiences. It is not argued that other forms of professional learning are invalid. Rather, it is argued that the most powerful and sustained impact is likely to be generated when certain conditions exist: the need for school improvement; conjoint principal and teacher vision; and

professional learning strategies that are collaborative; school-focused, and supported in terms of time. Emerging from such conditions is the teacher as an agent in school improvement, rather than as the object of school improvement.

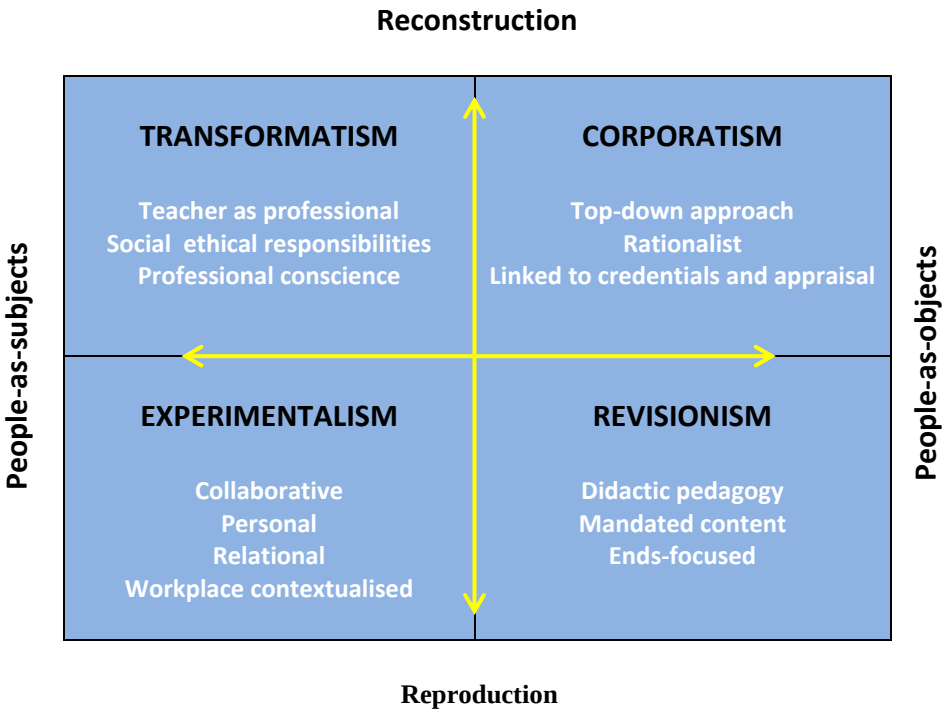

Figure 2.3. Four orientations to in-service education.
From "In-service education: New principles for practice,"
Logan and Dempster, 1992. p. 196.

Logan and Dempster's model is included here in Figure 2.3. As can be seen, it differentiates between the "classic administrative approach" (p. 126) to professional learning evident in the corporatist quadrant where transformation is required but emerges from a top-down change that can be measured quantitatively; to transformation through a change in perception through critical reflection, as is evident in the transformative quadrant. In the corporatist quadrant people are viewed as objects, whilst in the transformative quadrant, they are seen as subjects with agency.

The 'people-as-objects' quadrants e.g. corporatism and revisionism reflect a prescriptive or remedial approach to professional learning tied to Australian government driven initiatives, or systemic mandates, such as the introduction of the national curriculum, preparation for the National Assessment Program - Literacy and

Numeracy (NAPLAN) Testing, or Queensland Core Skills (QCS) testing, performance appraisal, or workplace health and safety matters . Generally, the approaches used in this type of professional learning involve a “didactic pedagogy” (1992, p. 126) or expert/novice relationship between presenter and participant. These quadrants place emphasis on the resource being adopted, an objectively driven and measurable outcome, rather than the development of new knowledge or the growth of a collaborative approach to learning. Teacher agency is thus restricted since the learning is product-focused and driven by a controlled agenda, rather than one that is motivated by research, constructivism, or teacher-led innovation (Logan & Dempster, 1992).

The transformative and experientialist quadrants share a view of teachers as subjects, where activity emerges from ‘within’ school forces, as opposed to outside school initiatives or mandates. Their difference lies in their outlook. According to Logan and Dempster, the experientialists are located within their classroom and the transformatives are located in the broader educational sphere as they take up the concerns of equity, individual and collective social consciousness (1992. p. 135).

Crowther’s research within Australian schools over the past decade and longer, in relation to the implementation of the IDEAS program, has centred on the school reform process and the role of both teachers and principals in the leadership of that reform. His work is “in direct defiance of soulless standardization” (Hargreaves, 2009, p. xi) and shares a transformative, reconstructivist view that real reform is situated in schools or learning communities where collective intelligence is transferred into new knowledge that is used for the sustainability and betterment of the world (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002). His model of parallel leadership is included in Figure 2.4.

The model represents the outcome of school improvement through the conjoint leadership efforts of principal and teachers. It shows parallelism of leadership in two spheres: the pedagogic, which is the province of teachers, and the strategic which is the province of the principal. This leadership is exerted upon school wide learning, culture building, and pedagogy that, when aligned, leads to enhanced school capacity. The concentric circles central to the model indicate that whilst pedagogy is

at the core of a teacher's work, pedagogy will ultimately be affected by the way in which schools learn, as well as the predominant culture of the school.

Inside the "black box": parallel leadership and enhanced school outcomes

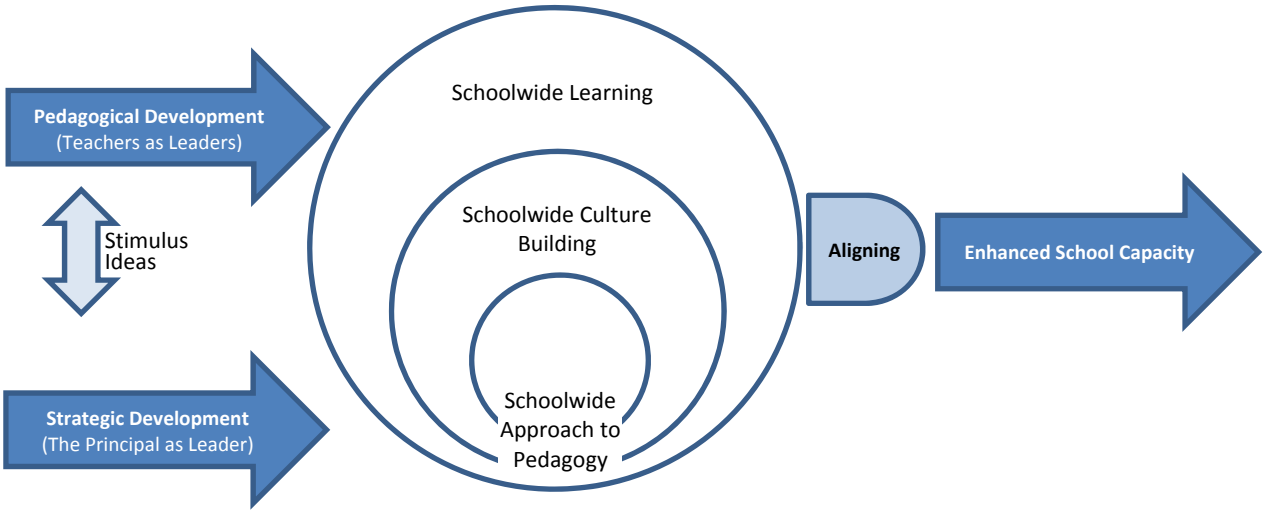

Figure 2.4. Crowther's Parallel Leadership Model. From "Parallel Leadership: A new strategy for successful school reform," by Crowther, Hann & McMaster, 2001, *The Practising Administrator*, 23, 12 – 14, p. 141.

Parallel leadership is derived from a decade of research into educational leadership by Crowther and others and is defined as "a process whereby teacher leaders and their principals engage in collective action to build school capacity. It embodies three distinct qualities – mutual trust, shared purpose, and allowance for individual expression" (Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2009. p. 53).

Crowther, Hann and McMaster's (2001) extensive research work with building school capacity through a parallel leadership model and via professional learning has been drawn upon to inform this study's theoretical framework (see Figure 2.5) for this study. Common with Crowther, Hann and McMaster's model is an emphasis on the combined forces of teacher leadership and principal leadership of professional learning, as a means of enhancing school capacity, or contributing to school improvement. There are departures, however; the term 'conjoint leadership' is used within the current study, because it is at the intersection of the work of teachers and principals. Crowther's term 'parallel' implies groups travelling in the same direction

but without intersection, in a similar way that young children are described by psychologists as being engaged in parallel play, aware of the other but not working together.

What is of direct interest, and not apparent in Crowther's work, is the way in which teacher agency, when coupled with planned, relevant collaborative professional learning that links directly to school improvement goals can bring about positive change at a classroom level. Crowther is concerned with teachers as a collective and the impact they have when aligned in parallel with their principal in terms of school goals and values. The framework that follows reflects many of these aspects and also focuses on the importance of teacher agency within the learning process and hence within school improvement or school capacity-building.

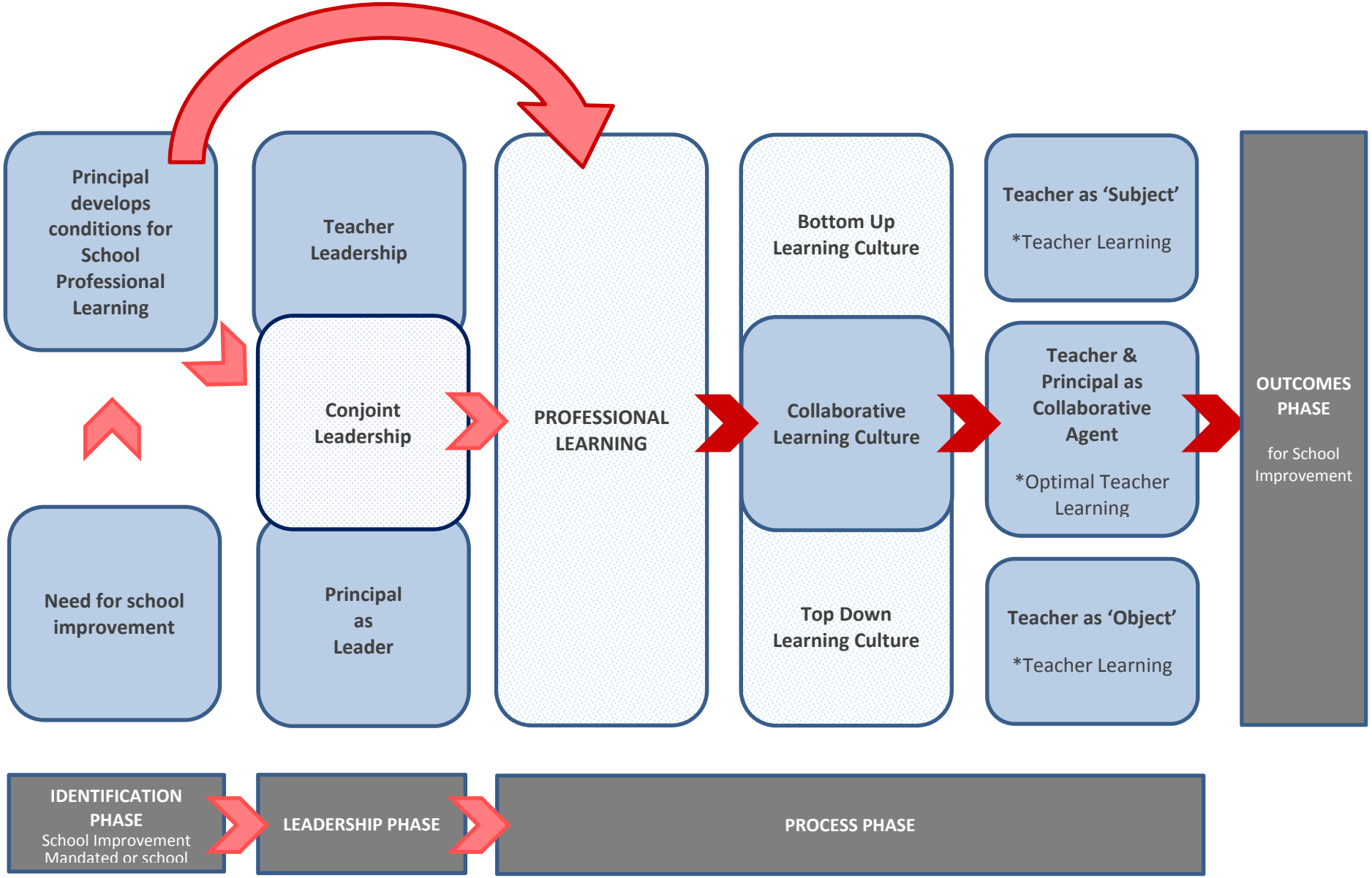

Figure 2.5. Teachers as agents of school improvement: A model of effective teacher professional learning.

2.6 EXPLANATION OF MODEL, TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Each phase represented within Figure 2.5 is now discussed more specifically.

2.6.1 Identification phase

Figure 2.6. Identification phase.

Inherent in the notion of school change, is improvement. Education agendas, whether driven from within schools, or externally via government-mandated programs, are concerned with 'improvement'. Stakeholders exert pressure whether their intentions are to improve for the good of one individual, the good of the school, the greater good of the community, or simply to meet targets set through external bodies.

The measure of improvement rests largely within the classroom where teacher expertise and student outcomes meet. It is argued, therefore, that for improvement to occur at a classroom level, then it must begin with teacher learning.

2.6.2 Principal's role

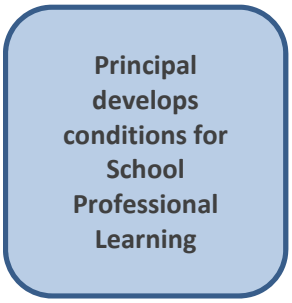

Figure 2.7. Principal's role.

The role of the principal in developing or supporting appropriate conditions for effective professional learning within a school context was a key focus of this study. The principal's role in developing appropriate conditions is seen within the literature as fundamental to the effective professional learning of teachers. These conditions include the principal as a lead learner; capable of allocating resources and building other support

structures such as time release; and, by challenging, stimulating and deepening their colleagues' commitment to high-quality professional practice (Bredeson, 2003. p. 74).

2.6.3 Leadership of professional learning

Figure 2.8. Leadership of professional learning.

Of central importance is the way in which learning is led within a school. It is proposed that teacher leadership, when nurtured and supported through the leadership of the principal, creates conjoint leadership that is ideal for the growth of a collaborative learning culture. Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002) describe this as parallel leadership – the place where "teacher leaders and their principals engage in collective action to build capacity" (p. 169). This model places importance upon the intersection of those two leadership modes and values the activity that occurs within that space of intersection. The term 'conjoint leadership' characterises this space. Crowther, alternatively, highlights this relationship as fundamental to the success of school improvement or school capacity-building, the term 'parallel' implies separateness between the two.

2.6.4 Process phase

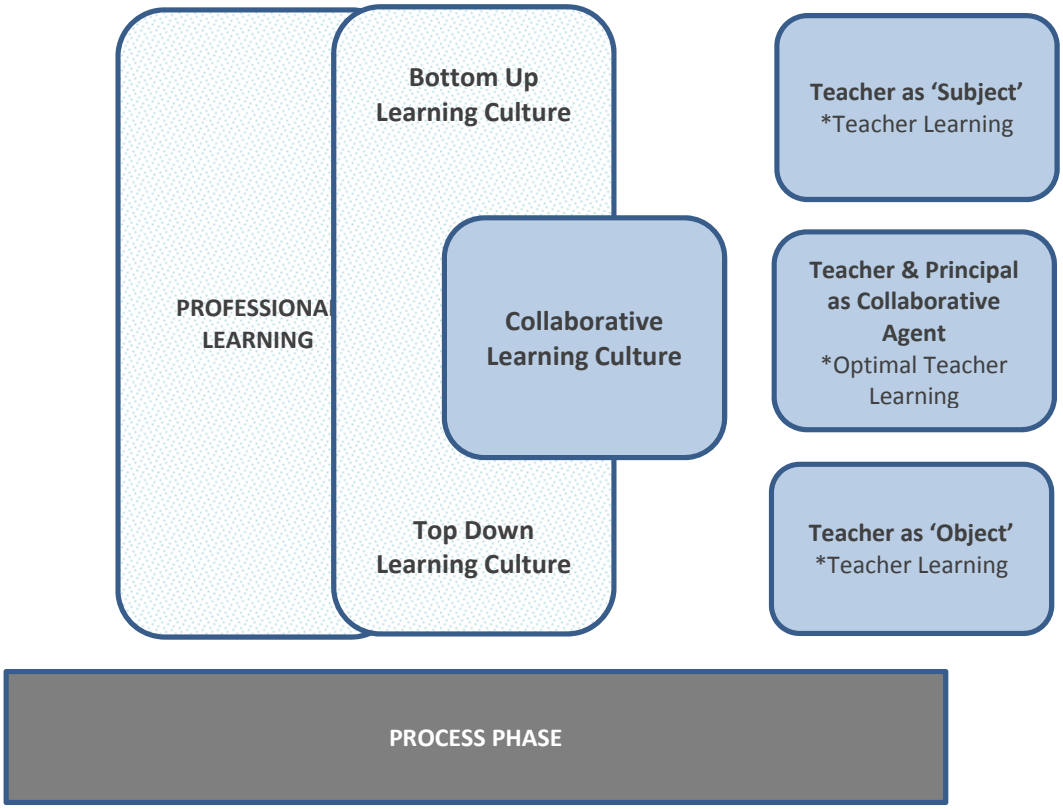

Figure 2.9. Process phase.

A fundamental means of school improvement occurs at the classroom level. It is argued that improvement in this area ensues best through the professional learning of teachers. This may occur through a 'bottom-up' or teacher-led approach, a 'top-down' mandated approach or via a collaborative approach where 'mutualism' and 'shared purpose' (Crowther, 2002. p. 169) embody the learning method. Thus a bottom up/top down approach may occur simultaneously, for example, where a mandated change such as the incorporation of the national curriculum is put into place (the what) and its implementation (the how) occurs through collaboration. Given the accountability-driven climate in which schools exist, at present, the challenge is to sustain a collaborative approach to working with mandated changes and data-fuelled agendas.

It is acknowledged that all three methods exist in any school, that is, top-down, bottom-up or collaborative. It is argued that teacher learning will likely occur in all three

situations; top-down, bottom up and collaborative or as independent agent; collaborative agent or object. These methods are akin to the four quadrants identified by Logan and Dempster (see Figure 2.3) where learning occurs differently in all quadrants, for different purposes and outcomes. However, it is in the collaborative learning culture zone where optimum learning will take place because it involves the sharing of wisdom between all (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009). This is represented within the process phase as Teacher and Principal as Collaborative Agent and is deemed the ideal conditions for optimal teacher learning.

2.6.5 Outcomes phase

Figure 2.10. Outcomes phase.

Professional learning creates a vehicle for school improvement, and the building of school capacity, through growing teacher learning. It is argued that the strength and sustainability of such school improvement should be enhanced when the teacher is an agent, rather than a subject, or free agent, within the school professional learning context. When teachers are learners, rather than objects (Logan & Dempster, 2002) and particularly when they are collaborative agents, then classroom pedagogy has the potential to be transformed. This is heightened further by a conjoint, collaborative approach to the leadership of learning.

The model has drawn insights from Logan and Dempster's 'Four orientations to in-service education' (Figure 2.3) and Crowther, Hann and McMaster's 2001 'Parallel leadership' model (Figure 2.4). This model (Figure 2.5) reflects a view that school improvement is more likely to occur when professional learning activities are structured, purposeful, aligned with school goals, and where high levels of teacher agency occur within that process. Teachers are both social products and social producers, and they can be objects or subjects within the process of professional learning. Logan and Dempster's model delineates between teachers as objects or as subjects, within their four orientations to in-service learning. The corporatism and revisionism quadrants objectify teachers as recipients of knowledge, whilst the transformation and experimentalism quadrants construct teachers subjectively, as participants with agency and engagement in learning.

Agency and engagement in learning aligns with Crowther, Hann and McMaster's model of parallel leadership which is founded on the principles of mutual respect, shared purpose and allowance for individual expression (Crowther, 2011. p. 177), all of which constitute teachers subjectively, rather than objectively. Research indicates that school improvement and professional learning are not in conflict with one another but are mutually interdependent (Frost, 2000. p.20). When teachers have agency within their professional learning they are able to influence the structure of the school culture. This reflects Gidden's view (1984) of these structures as intertwined and interdependent, yet both constraining and enabling.

By providing opportunities for teachers to engage with professional learning collaboratively and with increased levels of agency, it is anticipated that changed teacher learning practices will eventually lead to school improvement. Durrant and Holden (2006) stress the need for a "new approach to professional development in which it can be seen as both an input and an outcome in teachers' leadership of learning" (p. 8). Similarly, Fullan (2003. p. 28) states that "the principal of the future must lead a complex organisation by establishing new cultures in schools that have deep capacities to engage in continuous problem solving and improvement." It is argued that effective teacher professional learning must be at the heart of that new culture.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This review of literature began by exploring the current educational context which has been strongly influenced by a school improvement agenda. It is argued that improvement within a school is affected by the accountability pressures inherent in neo-liberal policy reform (Mulcahy, 2011) whilst also reflective of schools' genuine interest in bettering teaching and learning for all through networking teachers (McLaughlin, 2010). Trends in research that distinguished effective schools, as those where professional learning occurs collectively, reflectively, and without bureaucratic decision-making being the main impetus for a change in practice.

Following the discussion of educational context, the linked concepts of contemporary educational leadership, that is: teacher leadership, principal leadership, and distributed leadership were examined along with teacher agency and teacher professional learning. The shifting practices of leadership over the past few decades from a managerial, administrative paradigm to one where leadership is shared, distributed and collaboratively-based were explored. The discussion sought to add to the burgeoning body of literature regarding professional learning by focusing closely on its links to the manner in which leadership is distributed or shared within a school context.

Individual agency was identified as a powerful instrument in change at a personal and organisational level but even more so when it is enacted within a collaborative setting. The effects that collaborative, "relational" (Edwards, 2005) or "conjoint" (Gronn, 1993) agency might have upon the learning capabilities of a whole school community were discussed. It was argued that it is within the discourse of conjoint agency that the concept of distributed leadership is situated. Where agency is shared and the leadership of teacher learning distributed, then the potential for knowledge to be generated, sustained, and practice improved and reconstructed, rises significantly. Agency, it is argued, can exist and be fostered within the 'rules' of professional standards (Mulcahy, 2011. p.95) if teacher learning is supported by school principals in ways that are collaborative and non-hierarchical.

> Strength, resilience and creativity lie in a school's distributed, intelligence. It is worth repeating the old adage that no one person holds all of the wisdom. The shared wisdom of the group is much more powerful in releasing ideas than the wisdom of the one can ever be. When leadership and learning are treated as quite separate concepts, it hampers the ability of shared wisdom to deal with the challenges which a school faces.
> (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009. p. 79).

The literature review explained the relationship between teacher agency and professional learning structures within a school context. It identified the nature of that dynamic interrelationship; the contributing effects of principal leadership and teacher leadership; and showed that the way in which professional learning opportunities are organised and offered within a school will affect school improvement capability. It focused on the effects of heightened teacher agency as a means of heightening teacher engagement and more sustainable learning. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the theoretical framework upon which this study has been framed. The framework, represented diagrammatically as shown in Figure 2.5, revealed the socially constructed dynamic of organisational change within a school context.

The following chapter addresses both the theoretical and practical dimensions of the methodology used in this study by specifying the philosophical orientation, research design, and methods of investigation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

> *"The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it." (Stake, 1995, p. 43)*

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explored the literature pertaining to professional learning and its relevance to school improvement. Specifically, it focused on principal leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, teacher agency and collaborative learning practices, all of which illuminate our understanding of professional learning. Moreover, the literature review sought to provide a platform for considering the ways in which principals can support heightened levels of teacher agency within teacher professional learning.

This chapter outlines the methodology chosen for this study that of an interpretive, exploratory case study. The choice of a qualitative case study was deliberate, since it is both context-sensitive and concerned with participants' perceptions and judgments. Through triangulation of data and personnel, the study was designed to gain authentic insights and knowledge about teacher professional learning within the school (i.e. referred to as RC) context. Semi-structured interviews, a qualitative survey, a focus group session, and my own reflective journal are the basis of data that were collected.

The chapter is structured around the following general sections: case study justification, research context, research sample, data collection, data analysis, criteria for validating research, the researcher, ethical considerations and the limitations of a case study.

3.2 CASE STUDY JUSTIFICATION

3.2.1 Qualitative research – interpretivist paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (1995) state that qualitative research can be described as existing in one of three paradigms: interpretivist, positivist or critical. This qualitative study was posited within an interpretivist paradigm that is concerned with meaning-making

(Schwandt, 1994) and the way in which the world is experienced by those who live within it. In keeping with this definition, an interpretivist approach can also be termed as a constructivist approach. From an interpretive point of view, "both reality and knowledge are constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practice. Knowledge about reality is, therefore, always mediated through the researcher" (Tracy, 2012. p. 40).

Essentially, "qualitative research seeks to understand what happens, what things mean, to generate new and relevant concepts, and to find out what is important to participants" (Carter, Ritchie & Sainsbury, 2009. p. 105). As described by Carter, Ritchie and Sainsbury (2009), this study sought to understand teacher professional learning, generate new and relevant concepts and to do this by finding out what was important to the teachers at RC in terms of their professional learning. Qualitative research is founded upon three concepts, according to Tracy (2012, pp. 2 -3): self-reflexivity, context, and thick description. The self-reflexivity of the experiences, points of view, and roles of teachers, framed and shaped this study's research scene. To understand the context of that scene required immersion by me as researcher and this occurred through gaining a thick description of that context, and the particular circumstances relating to teacher professional learning at RC.

Additionally, the choice to use qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to research stems from alignment with socio-constructivists like Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) and Sergiovanni (1992) whose work places emphasis on the shaping of conceptions, rather than the measurement of them. The interactive nature of socio-constructivism aligned well with the decision to draw data primarily from interviews that served as learning conversations for me, as researcher. As suggested by Logan and Dempster (1992, p.195), professional learning structures tend to support a particular worldview; one where perspective participants are either constructed with, or without agency within the process. This study was concerned with working with teachers to develop understanding about teacher professional learning through the collaborative construction of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) between the researcher and that which had been researched. Meaning-making, inquiry and action are fundamental concepts to constructivism (Day,

1999; Fullan, 1993; Starratt, 2004; Wenger, 1998). This intentionality is described by Giddens (1984) as agency to act and to transform.

The need to conduct the study within a naturalistic setting was important since meaning is so bound to context, and intricately wired to people and places (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Stake 1995). In all qualitative research the greatest criticism lies in the positivist's belief that such an approach is subjective, biased and without validity. The tension between perceptions and facts, the 'believed' rather than the tangible, reflects the great divide between the positivists and the naturalists. Rodwell (1990) describes the divide as a series of choices between "simple or complex realities; from hierarchic to heterarchic concepts; mechanical or holographic images; determinancy or indeterminancy." As researcher and principal within a specific school context, I sought to build knowledge from a naturalistic perspective because I wanted to understand teachers' situational knowledge, and their subjective (Rodwell, 1990. p. 33) experience of teacher professional learning.

Further, the study drew from a holistic, rather than a narrow perspective, and the complex interplay between perception of facts and values (Weisma 2000). The natural environment and the natural context were deemed fundamental to understanding the multifarious factors that contribute to the success or failure of achieving educational improvement (Simons, 1996). It is acknowledged that within the natural context there are contentious issues that must be accepted. Additionally, the context cannot be manipulated (Yin, 1984) since the study takes place whilst the school continues to function, in a typical sense. To view the context through qualitative research produced an opportunity for the familiar to be rendered both unfamiliar and strange (Simons, 1996).

3.2.2 An interpretivist exploratory case study

In keeping with the theoretical framework as discussed in the previous chapter is the methodological choice of an interpretivist exploratory qualitative case study approach. Yin (1993) sees this as relevant to research that is set within a real-life context and Stake (1994) emphasises that it is not so much a methodological choice, rather a choice to

investigate a particular object, or case. This choice of interpretive methodology was designed to enhance perception of educational action, specifically the effects of teacher agency upon professional learning structures. Yin (2003) also categorises case studies, describing them as exploratory, explanatory or descriptive. The categorisation of 'interpretive exploratory' best fits the purpose of this study which was to explore and interpret understandings of teacher professional learning within the boundary of the case study: RC. It was also a practical approach for generation of meaningful data to answer the research questions posed, and to allow for informed responses to teacher professional learning structures at RC.

Schwandt (1994) in writing of case study research stated: "to understand the world of meaning, one must interpret it" (p. 118). The choice of interpretive, exploratory case study research as a means of understanding existing teacher professional learning practices at RC was deemed an appropriate means to view those practices in situ, and through the eyes of those directly involved in that setting. Since the research questions were concerned with real life interpretations of teacher professional learning, the teachers' interpretations were informed through meanings attributed by their lived experience within the case study setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Furthermore, case studies allow for depth of research (Blatter 2008), in this situation, a deep incision into the existing teacher professional learning practices at RC.

This incision was made possible through the collection of data from multiple sources that were both accessible and sought out. A meticulous study of that data afforded an illumination (Gillham, 2010) of existing teacher professional learning practices. Additionally, the data had ecological validity (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1989) because, as is typified by case study methodology, it allowed for the collation of context-rich data from its natural setting that, in analysis, both illuminated existing teacher professional learning practices and also allowed for the construction of a new way of explaining the phenomenon of teacher professional learning (Moore, Lapan & Quartaroli, 2011. p. 232).

The ‘particularistic’ case as described by Merriam (1998), afforded a holistic perspective of participant views, and inherent in the process of gleaning information from them, was the promotion of value to each of their voices. Through the chosen interpretivist exploratory case study methodology all responses were deemed valid, none viewed as more important than another. The case study as a naturalistic inquiry was not concerned with statistical data or objectified theory, rather, it drew upon participants’ experiences and emotions that helped me as a researcher to construct a particular world view within the RC context. Guba and Lincoln (1995) also contend that the inquirer-respondent relationship is specific to any given context, and therefore the study needed to take place in its natural setting.

Case studies are inherently complex nonetheless. Simons (1996) discusses the paradox of the case study, where, through study of the uniqueness of the particular, an understanding of the universal occurs. It is necessary, according to Simons, to experience the tension of the paradox to facilitate a new understanding of a particular situation and to allow for a re-examination of an idea or concept. Yet it is in the self-contained specificity of the study that the richness emerges. In the current study that utilised a qualitative interpretivist exploratory research process, there was an opportunity not only to understand the range and the extent to which participants engaged in professional learning but also this insight provided an important step towards improving practices at RC.

In summary, an interpretive exploratory case study within the qualitative research paradigm was selected as the most effective means of examining existing teacher professional learning practices at RC. The choice reflected a constructivist view of learning whereby the perceptions of participants were seen as vital to meaning-making within the context of RC. For school improvement to occur in the future, it was deemed important to draw from the voices of those directly involved within the enactment of teacher professional learning at RC and as researcher, to visualise it, in context, but through different eyes. Bhattacharya (2008) reminds us that central to the interpretive framework is the notion of *Verstehen* or understanding (p.465) and central to this approach in the current study was the development of new understandings.

3.3 RESEARCH CONTEXT

The case was located in an independent girls' boarding and day school in a regional area of Queensland. The research drew mainly from primary and secondary teachers' views of teacher professional learning at RC. The timing of data collection was significant since it coincided with the completion of a Pilot Collaborative Practices Project that had been run in the school for twelve months prior. This was coincidental, not deliberate, since the pilot project was conceived independently from my research and put into practice two years after my doctoral studies began. My study was concerned with the wider picture of teacher professional learning at RC and captured a variety of perspectives through interview, survey and reflections in my journal between October and November 2011. Thus, the study was a snapshot or point in time picture of professional learning at the school.

The questions asked of participants and the responses that they provided to the survey and interview were broader than the pilot project, although some questions were related specifically to it. The pilot project represented an effort to strengthen professional learning practices at RC. At the time of data collection it was deemed helpful to gain insight into participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the project, since it constituted a significant focus of professional learning carried out in the school during that time. A description of the project is included to provide further contextual information.

3.3.1 Collaborative practices pilot project description

In September of 2010, two educational consultants with experience in the field, both as educators and researchers, were invited by me in my role as Principal, along with the Head of Teaching and Learning, to work at RC. Their specific instructed focus was on developing teacher understandings of the value and place of action research and peer partnerships in strengthening collaborative practice in relation to classroom pedagogy. In January of 2011, 43 teachers of the 68 full time teachers volunteered to work with the consultants until the project's conclusion in September of that year.

During 2011, all teachers were given background information on how the Collaborative Practices Pilot Project might unfold and were then invited to investigate a specific aspect of teaching and learning at RC, either at an individual level or an identified wider area of interest. The general purpose was to engage teachers in a trial of collaborative practice either by joining an action research team or a peer partnership. Specifically, the project was designed to develop participants' skills in working collaboratively and researching topics related specifically to teaching practice. As a trade-off for the investments the teachers would make, the school provided infrastructure support including time for collaboration for those involved in the pilot group.

To begin the process, those 43 teachers engaged in the pilot project were asked to consider their teaching practice during the previous 12 months and to identify:

- an aspect of their teaching that they wished to extend their pedagogical repertoire, or;
- an individual or group of students who they would like to teach more effectively, or;
- an individual or group of students whose performance was not as good as they would like, or;
- a topic or subject they wished to extend their content/concept knowledge, or modes of student inquiry.

Two-thirds of the group opted to participate in action-research projects, whilst one-third joined a peer partnership. Most secondary teachers opted for action research, whilst most primary school teachers, selected to be involved with a peer partnership. Teachers engaged in the action research projects were invited to select an area of interest to their group, that was related to the culture and ethos of RC, and that would potentially improve teaching and learning practices. The teacher-devised action-research projects sought answers to the questions outlined below.

- How effective are our approaches to Queensland Core Skills Test preparation?
- What is impacting on the academic achievement of boarding students?
- To what extent are gossip and bullying detrimental to student engagement?

- How effective is the use of mathematical investigations utilising the DIRE model of differentiation on the attitude, engagement and retention level of Year 8 Mathematics students?
- What teaching methods can be used to re-engage disengaged Science students?

Teachers who formed peer partnerships were also invited to seek feedback in a self-generated area of their own teaching practice. Whilst the facilitators offered possible topics for exploration, teachers were ultimately given choice in decision-making. The emphasis was on developing a culture of shared classroom practice; the aspect chosen to observe was secondary to the process itself. These teachers sought this project because of specific interest in aspects of their own teaching practice. For example, they sought answers to the following questions:

- How effectively do I explain difficult Mathematical concepts?
- How much time do I engage in 'didactic talk' during a lesson?
- How can I increase the level of student collaboration within my classroom?

The project concluded in September of 2011. All participants presented their findings and aspects of their learning to the whole school teaching staff. Some peer partnerships and some research projects continued after that date. Since this time, in-house professional learning has become a more regular part of RC's approach to teacher professional learning. It has become more collaborative, research-based and directly relevant to classroom practice. Furthermore, as a result of the pilot project, more professional learning has been held at RC rather than off campus, to ensure that the focus of the learning is contextual and directly relevant to the work of RC. Since 2011, experts in the education field, such as the consultants involved in this project, University lecturers, Restorative Practices practitioners, a Thinker in Residence and Independent Schools of Queensland consultants continue to be engaged to work in the school for a year or longer to provide support for teachers as they work to improve their teaching practices.

The seven teachers interviewed for the research study and who participated in the focus group were part of the volunteer Collaborative Practices Pilot Project group. From their interview data it is apparent that their involvement in the pilot project heightened their interest in the research study and hence, their voluntary participation. Whilst no data were collected to discern why others did not volunteer to be interviewed, it is possible that some teachers may have viewed an interview as threatening or were unsure what would happen with their data. I am aware anecdotally that some teachers forgot to respond via email in time to register their interest. I informed staff that I was seeking a minimum of five teachers and some were mindful that more than five teachers had volunteered and did not offer to be interviewed because the necessary number had been reached. It was pleasing to note that the final number, seven, exceeded the minimum number required, and each of these teachers responded very quickly to the request. That the seven teachers who volunteered had also volunteered to be involved in the pilot program may have indicated their propensity to take learning risks, or that they valued having agency and voice in the way learning occurred at RC.

The seven interviewed teachers represented cross-faculty departments and ranged from highly experienced to those less experienced in terms of years of teaching. Some had specific leadership roles within the school and some were classroom teachers. A critical friend, who had undertaken work within the school and thus was known to some staff members, interviewed the seven teachers and the educational consultants, as well as facilitated the focus group session with the seven teachers following their interviews.

In the interests of maintaining participant confidentiality, interviewed teachers were referred to throughout the Findings chapter via a code. Each of the seven teachers was designated with a code, including a number between one and seven. For example, TI#03, means ‘interviewed teacher number three.’ Whilst individual participants might be able to recognise their responses, it is unlikely that others would be able to attribute their remarks to them. The consultants are referred to as C#1 and C#2. Whilst teachers of RC involved in the pilot collaborative practices project could identify the two consultants by name, they would not be able to attribute comments to one consultant or the other. For the purposes of accurate reporting, surveyed staff were attributed with a code, also. For

example, TS#28 refers to a surveyed teacher who was the twenty-eighth respondent. The pseudonym RC (Regional College) is used throughout this study to increase anonymity, although it would not be difficult to discern the name of the school, through the description, or via the principal's name.

3.4 RESEARCH SAMPLE

A deliberate selection of participants, a purposive sample (Wiersma, 1991) was chosen. Initially all teachers from the case study school were asked to complete an anonymous e-survey that recorded their views on professional learning, teacher agency and the principal's role in supporting both. Forty-eight of a possible 68 teachers responded which represents a 73.8% return rate. The opinions gleaned from this e-survey provided a platform for considering point in time views of teacher professional learning at RC The insights of a select group of seven teacher volunteers who were interviewed individually and as part of a focus group session, gave deeper insights into professional learning at RC and further afield. Additionally, the two educational consultants who worked at RC in 2011 as leaders of the pilot collaborative practices project, were also interviewed.

These seven voluntary teacher participants, drawn from and across the Junior, Middle and Senior schools were part of the initial group of 43 of the teaching staff who were involved in the pilot collaborative learning project facilitated by the two educational consultants. The nature of this pilot collaborative learning project has been outlined.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

The chosen research methods of the e-survey, semi-structured interviews, focus group and principal's reflective journal provided an effective means for considering the ways in which primary and secondary teachers, the seven teacher interview participants, two educational consultants and the principal/researcher view professional learning at RC, as well as through their own individual, broader educational reality.

3.5.1 Methods

Methods are the means of data generation and analysis and need to be appropriately placed within the research paradigm that they support. A collection of data through multiple sources to investigate the social phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003) strengthened evidence and enhanced credibility in this study. The range of sources were utilised to gain information regarding this and a triangulation of data was assured, hence increasing the 'reputability' (Stake, 1994) of the interpretation. The methods utilised recognised the importance of participants' perspectives as well as the significance of the contextual factors that construct and mediate their 'world view'.

Specifically, the methods of data collection included a qualitative e-survey that was completed by 48 of a possible 68 teaching staff members. Seven volunteer teachers participated in one-hour individual interviews conducted by a critical friend. Further to this, a one hour focus group session with the seven volunteer teachers was held to elicit further information regarding, any themes or ideas raised in the interview process. As an adjunct to this data, self-reflective data in the form of a journal kept by me, as principal, was included; this also comprised some documentation regarding professional learning at RC, email correspondence with the educational consultants, as well as observations and insights following analysis of the research process.

3.5.2 E-survey

With the burgeoning of technology it is not surprising that there has been increasing use of online or e-surveys in social research (Glover & Bush, 2005. p.135). The advantages of such a method of data collection include, according to Glover and Bush, (2005. pp. 144 - 145): the ability to draw upon a much wider range of respondents; an opportunity to elicit opinion and reflection on guided topics; opportunity to record comments in such a way that data can be retrieved in various formats for consideration; and finally, the implication that the results may be more credible, because of anonymity.

It is the latter two advantages that relate to the use of an e-survey within this study. The structure of distribution enabled anonymity for respondents and the data were able to be

extracted in various ways, including tabular form, key phrases and ideas. Furthermore, since this was an e-survey, rather than a hard copy survey, there was no need to enter data manually. I suspect that there may have been a higher return rate also, because of convenience.

The e- survey was distributed to all teachers at the case study school. It was largely descriptive (Burns, 1996) in construction (see Appendix 1) and sought to stimulate articulation of existing understandings (p. 467) of professional learning through neutral, rather than leading or implying questions (Lappan et al., 2011. p.256). Specifically, this ten question e-survey was designed to elicit general information about each teacher's personal perceptions about professional learning. There was also a question seeking specific feedback about the collaborative learning project in which some teachers elected to join. Some of the questions were open-ended, which allowed participants to write a more extended response. For example, Question 1. What is the difference between professional development and professional learning? Or Question 8. Why did you or didn't you choose to be part of this year's pilot collaborative learning project? (See Appendix 1 for full e-survey).

The background information derived from the e-survey also provided a point of reference during the interview process for the critical friend, who was given a summary of key ideas gleaned from the surveys (see Appendix 5). The survey data assisted me in identifying some broad themes about professional learning, teacher agency, and principal and teacher leadership prior to the commencement of the interview period. It also assisted me in identifying if there were any areas of disgruntlement with existing practices associated with teacher professional learning.

3.5.3 The interview

> Teachers, like their students, have prior learning experiences and bring different conceptual and social resources that are influenced by their cultural heritages to the learning experience. (Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008. p. 340)

The primary research technique in the study was the interview, since this technique is deemed the most important source of information in a case study (Yin, 1993). Interviews provide 'deep data' (Yin, 1993) and 'thick description' (Geerz, 1983) that enable a vicarious experience of the case study. We interview to find out what we do not know, or would not know, without interviewing and the process allows us to capture insights that would otherwise be unavailable (Forsey, 2012. p.364). Interviews, according to Merriam (1998), "allow the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, responding to the emerging worldview of the respondent, whilst gaining a new view on the topic" (p. 74). It was appropriate to use a research method where the sharing of ideas and the valuing of different perspectives and impressions were at the core. This methodological approach mirrored the type of professional learning that was becoming more practised in the RC context.

A one hour block of time is suggested by Glesne and Peshkin (1992) as a good 'rule of thumb', although they also suggest that a longer or shorter period of time may also be appropriate and a variety of reasons govern this. Within this research context, the interview was used to build a picture from the voices of stakeholders and also insider/outsider educational consultants. As argued in the previous chapter, the principles of teacher leadership, distributed leadership, parallel leadership (Crowther, Hann & McMaster, 2001), and teacher agency are fundamental to an effective framework for sustainable professional learning. It was apt, therefore, to employ research methods that valued the voice of the teacher as well as the views of the educational consultant.

An exploratory interpretive approach allowed pursuit of alternative viewpoints and to probe deeply into any unanticipated disclosures that occurred during the interview. Perceptions are built through a range of factors that arise from diverse social and cultural experiences, organisational characteristics, and personality qualities, and it was these qualities that brought depth and richness to the data. To gain a naturalistic view of the context it was important that there was direct contribution of those engaged in teacher professional learning. A semi-structured interview (see Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 for sample questions) was utilised and this allowed sufficient structure and flexibility to

ensure consistency of approach, whilst valuing the differences that each participant brought, as well as the ability to pursue different tangents that emerged during the interview process.

3.5.4 Critical friend as interviewer

Limerick, Burgess-Limerick and Grace, (1996) in work on the politics of interviewing, highlight the power relations that affect the dynamics of the interview. A third person, as interviewer, helped to minimise this unequal relationship. The critical friend was known to all interviewees since she had worked in the school over the previous decade as a professional learning facilitator. Her background areas of teaching, counselling, mediation and restorative practices gave her insight into the educational setting and also skilful ability as an interviewer.

3.5.5 Interview process

Potential interviewees were invited, at a staff meeting, to be part of the data collection process. Their expression of interest was directed to the critical friend/interviewer, rather than to me as researcher. This was intended to provide distance between principal and teacher and develop a more professional relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

I met with the critical friend prior to the interview process and provided her with a summary of information from the e-surveys as well as the series of questions to be utilised. We also met at the end of the two days of interviews in a de-brief session which provided emphasis to some of the information gleaned. For example, the critical friend reinforced the importance of pressure and support as the tension required for effective teacher professional learning to take place. She also emphasised that the teachers placed great value on the influence of the principal as lead learner and passionate learner.

A semi-structured interview process was followed, through which the critical friend asked an identical set of questions to each interviewee as the prime method of data collection. (See Appendix 2). Interviewing seven teachers and the two educational

consultants who facilitated the collaborative learning project provided different perspectives of the subject under focus.

Interviews were conducted on an individual basis, face-to-face and for a duration of between 45 and 60 minutes at the site of research, which was the place of work for the seven teachers. It was the place of occasional work for the two educational consultants who were also interviewed as a pair. With the permission of the participants, the data were recorded on a MP3 digital voice recorder and downloaded as computer files and converted to word text. The interview was recorded because it offered that which is "native" to the context and reflected language that has specific meaning in this school only. Recording also allowed for a development of a cumulative picture and the nuances of voice, intonation and emphasis gave further meaning to the word text.

3.5.6 Focus group interview

Fern (2001) in writing of focus groups, states that it is "not productive to offer methodological prescriptions for different types of focus groups, since each focus group project is unique" (p.5). The focus group was an effective method for data collection because there was strong group cohesion, a characteristic Fern (2001) deems as critical to focus group success. The group was convened by the critical friend as interviewer and the seven teacher interviewees immediately following the final individual interview. Whilst guiding questions were provided for the interviewer the aim was not just designed for data collection. New ideas, and the generation of a productive discussion were sought (Forsey, 2012. p. 393 - 394). Furthermore, it was intended that the group session would provide a dynamic interaction between the interviewer and the seven teacher interviews and allow them the opportunity to express any further thoughts or to build upon the ideas of their colleagues. Participants were able to hear one another's perspectives (Vaughan, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996) and it was anticipated that this would provide stimulus for deeper reflection. Whilst there is a danger of a dominant voice (Greenbaum, 1998) within the focus group, the skill of the interviewer and the cohesion of the group were important factors in ensuring the successful joint sharing of ideas.

3.5.7 Principal's reflective journal

A fourth source of data was gained through a reflective journal that yielded raw data for analysis (Street, 1995) and gave a principal's perspective, rather than a teacher's perspective of teacher professional learning at RC The notion of writing things down, even in the limited context in which data were collected had a "clarifying and focusing effect" (Gillham, 2010. p. 23) and provided a context for interpretation of the interview, focus group and survey data (Simons, 2009. p.67). Some recent documentation from College records in relation to professional learning, as well as email correspondence with the educational consultants and the transcript of a post interview with the critical friend, was included in the journal.

From September to November of 2011 a reflective journal was compiled that captured my responses to the emerging ideas and information yielded through the survey and interview transcripts. My own personal perspective as a professional learner and principal within the school under study was included. The main text related to a deep reflective response to the data yielded through interview and survey. As an adjunct to the material gained through the other sources, a cumulative picture of the case under study was developed.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis within the qualitative paradigm can be gathered in many ways for the purposes of abstracting, synthesising and integrating ideas, themes and concepts (Burns, 1996. p. 376). In analysing the data collected from four different sources, there was an intention to understand, interpret and gain a holistic view of the insights and perceptions inherent. An eclectic mix of data analysis methods drew partially from Miles and Huberman's (1994) three step model of: data reduction, data display and data conclusion and verification; aspects of Strauss and Corbin's (1980) grounded theory insofar as the data were grounded in the perceptions of the participants, their description of coding as mining the data to unearth buried treasures within (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) also had resonance; and as suggested by Glesne and Peshkin (1992) data analysis occurred simultaneously with the collection of data, rather than at the end of the collection period.

Additionally, the three fundamental principles of case study data collection as identified by Burns (1996) were followed, that is: the use of multiple sources; the maintenance of a chain of evidence; and the careful recording of data (p. 374). Burns emphasises the importance of diverse sources as a means of strengthening the case and this study incorporated an e-survey, semi-structured interviews, a focus group session and a reflective journal to achieve this. Since, as Punch (2006) emphasises, qualitative research is typically drawn from words (p.52) and it was deemed important to capture a diversity of words from a diversity of voices in a range of contexts. Woodside (2010) refers to the importance of collecting data from multiple sources and context as a useful tool in "confirming or refuting the accuracy of the findings" (p. 401).

Further, a chain of evidence was established through the process of moving from formulation of questions derived from the literature, to initial data collection, then analysis of data, the formulation of a model and ultimately a series of conclusions. The careful recording of data was evident in the analysis of each survey question and survey response, the full transcripts of each interview and the principal's reflective journal. Together, this allowed for the strengthening of the study's credibility by the diversity of data-gathering methods utilised, and ultimately supported the emergence of deeper theoretical propositions (O'Donoghue, 2006. p. 99).

Underpinning the eclecticism of these approaches was the consistent voice of Simons (2009) who writes that as data are organised, categorised and themes and patterns emerge, it is the researcher who makes sense of the story that develops. In essence, it would be more apt to discuss my treatment of the data as interpretive, rather than analytical. An interpretive approach aligned with the constructivist underpinnings of the methods chosen to derive the data for this study. Simons (2009) speaks of the intuitive and instinctive treatment of data by the researcher so that meaning can be made. This does not discount the careful treatment of data that occurred with this study and the processes put in place to verify its credibility and to draw ideas from the deepest of layers.

To ensure credibility of findings, as data were collected, synthesised and categorised, individual scripts were sent to participants for feedback or final clarification (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). As well as this, as part of the coding process, codes were designated to each participant at interview or survey, to maintain anonymity, confidentiality and ethical treatment of data. The process of selective coding of interview transcripts, (O'Donoghue, 2006. p. 98) survey responses and Principal's reflective journal afforded the development of a thematic picture of teacher professional learning at RC. Thus the study was shaped as it progressed through on-going analysis, and this involved the application of coding systems to determine core themes and key ideas expressed by individual participants. The notion of collecting, displaying, reducing, drawing conclusions, and verifying requires a system. In initial reduction of data, Miles and Huberman's (1984) and Janesick's (1994) suggestions for counting themes and patterns, checking plausibility, clustering ideas, and creating metaphors were all relevant. For each method used to collect data there was a process of reduction, or, in a more qualitative sense, a transformation of that data (Wolcott, 1994). The data were then classified in tabular format, using thematic headings (see Appendix 5).

Vaughan, Schumm and Sinagub's model (1996) was appropriate in identifying issues, unitising data, developing themes from the units of information and, finally, classifying the specific themes. Ely (1991), and Lofland and Lofland (1984) discuss the importance of categorisation of specific data, and a reflective process such as this concurs with the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative interpretive research. The reading between the lines was a crucial part of uncovering subtleties and nuances that can only be rendered through qualitative research, and allowed the familiar in the strange and the strange in the familiar (Geertz, 1983) to become apparent.

Schwandt (2001), in describing methods of data coding refers to a grounded, posteriori, inductive context-sensitive scheme. This scheme, or approach, was used to code data collected from interviews, the focus group session, e-surveys and my reflective journal. This method drew from the language of the respondents and from 'observed facts' and since the aim was to capture and value the voice of teachers within the case study context, this was an appropriate choice. Reading, re-reading and reading to identify

themes constituted the treatment of the written word. It also allowed “diamonds in the rough” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008. p.66) to emerge.

The interpretation of data for this study followed an holistic approach, derived from deep and focused immersion within all of the data collected, sifting and sorting of ideas, themes, and issues until an understanding of the picture of teacher professional learning at RC emerged with clarity. The links between this picture and the two research questions were also apparent. Simons (2009) aptly refers to interpretation as an art form, a metaphor that is effectively aligned with a constructivist view of learning, a philosophical position that aligns with the theoretical framework upon which this study was based.

A tabular representation of the research approach as linked with each research question follows, before the soundness and reliability of the research data are considered, followed by a discussion of the researcher, the ethical considerations and finally, a summary of the chapter.

RESEARCH APPROACH SUMMARY RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

Table 3.1 *Research Approach – Research Question 1*

Research questions	Research Purposes	Research Methods	Time Line	Data Analysis
1. What processes enable or constrain increased levels of teacher agency within teacher professional learning in a whole school context?	A) Develop a view of each teacher's understanding of the professional learning context in which they operate. Gauge each teacher's view of their agency within the process. B) Develop an understanding of how each of the 2 educational consultants overseeing the project view the importance of teacher agency within a professional learning culture. C) Gain insight into perceptions of my influence upon, and responsibilities towards the professional learning of teachers at RC	A1) **Full Teaching Staff Survey** –gained general insights into teacher beliefs about professional learning, teacher agency and my role as principal in supporting both. A2) **Semi-structured interviews** related to both research questions (approx.60 minutes each) with 7 teachers, 2 educational consultants – conducted by critical friend (primary data). Gleaned background information in regards to biographical material such as their personal and educational history, educational viewpoint, influences in their educational outlook and their personal perceptions and understandings about professional learning. (primary data, qualitative survey instrument). Two separate sets of questions were prepared – one for teachers, and one for consultants. Some common questions were included across both interviews. A3) **Focus Group session:** involved the 7 volunteer teachers – conducted by critical friend, following the interview sessions. A4) **Principal's Reflective Journal** Impressions, ideas, some documentation including emails with consultants.	**E-survey:** E-mail distribution to allow anonymity of respondents. Distributed on-line October 4 **Interviews**: October 17 – 18 2011. **Focus Group Session:** October 18. Following the interviews a focus group session with the 7 volunteer teachers will be used to clarify and extend upon central themes raised in the interview process. **Principal's Reflective Journal** On-going from September until November 11 2011.	*Qualitative interpretation of survey findings. Identification of key themes and ideas related to professional learning and teacher agency *Coding categories are likely to develop hand-in-hand with analysis. A grounded, a posteriori, (from experience) inductive context-sensitive coding scheme. *On-going comparative analysis (Taylor & Bogden, 1998) will confirm interview and focus group understandings. Transcripts will be sent to participants for verification. *Transcription of interviews and focus group discussion. Identification of key themes and ideas related to professional learning and teacher agency. *Analysis of themes and ideas emerging from Principal's journal.

RESEARCH APPROACH SUMMARY RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

Table 3.2 *Research Approach – Research Question 2*

Research questions	Research Purposes	Research Methods	Time Line	Data Analysis
2. How and in what ways do school principals influence the development of professional learning for teachers in a school?	A) Develop a view of each teacher's understanding of the principal's influence upon their school context as well as the general role of any principal in influencing professional learning. B) Develop an understanding of how each of the 2 educational consultants overseeing the project would identify enablers, constraints, and principal influence within a professional learning culture. C) Gain insight into the perceptions of my influence upon, and responsibilities towards the professional learning of teachers in a school.	A1) **Full Teaching Staff Survey** – gained general insights into teacher beliefs about professional learning, teacher agency and my role as principal in supporting both. A2) **Semi-structured interviews** related to both research questions (approx.45 minutes each) with 7 teachers, 2 educational consultants – conducted by critical friend (primary data). Gleaned background information in regard to biographical material such as their personal and educational history, educational viewpoint, influences in their educational outlook and their personal perceptions and understandings about professional learning. (primary data, qualitative survey instrument). Two separate sets of questions were prepared – one for teachers, and one for consultants. Some common questions were included across both interviews. A3) **Focus Group session:** involved the 7 volunteer teachers – conducted by critical friend A4) **Principal's Reflective Journal** Impressions, ideas, insights, including some documentation.	**General E-survey:** E survey to allow anonymity of respondents. Distributed on October 4. Collated independently through Information Technology Department. **Interviews**: October 17 – 18 2011 **Focus Group Session:** October 18. Following the interviews a focus group session with the 7 volunteer teachers will be used to clarify and extend upon central themes raised in the interview process. **Principal's Reflective Journal** On-going from October until November 11 2011.	*Qualitative interpretation of survey findings. Identification of key themes and ideas related to professional learning and principal influence *Coding categories are likely to develop hand-in-hand with analysis. A grounded, a posteriori, (from experience) inductive context-sensitive coding scheme. *On-going comparative analysis (Taylor & Bogden, 1998) will confirm interview and focus group understandings. Transcripts will be sent to participants for verification. *Transcription of interviews and focus group discussion. Identification of key themes and ideas related to professional learning and principal influence. .

3.7 CRITERIA FOR VALIDATING RESEARCH

A number of deliberate strategies were used to engage readers of this thesis with the veracity of experience of the research as gained through multiple methods of data collection. It is vital that the reader can follow the linkage of initial research questions to ultimate conclusions since it is the reader who will decide on transferability of the findings and it is the responsibility of the writer, to make that transferability as feasible as is possible. If the work is epistemologically in accord with the understanding of the reader then (Stake as cited in Simons, 1996) the far greater is its transferability.

The typical methods of ensuring validity were not relevant in the study that was conducted and, as such, Marshall and Rossman's (1995) term, "soundness" is used. This term, soundness, draws from the notion that validity emerges from its relationship to those things it is intended to be an account of, not from the external measures used to validate and produce it. The alternative, Marshall and Rossman's (1995) 'Criteria of Soundness', includes four main concepts: - credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Marshall and Rossman's work links with that conducted by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who reported on the importance of "trustworthiness" of reported observations. The main concepts of Marshall and Rossman's (1995) 'Criteria of Soundness' are now discussed.

3.7.1 Credibility

According to Rodwell (1990) "credibility is established through persistent, prolonged engagement" (p.30) with that which is under study. This approach ensures the opportunity to understand the most salient characteristics of the site. Given that the researcher/principal and the teacher respondents were staff members of the school under study, it is understood that collectively they had broad understanding of the salient characteristics of the site and that the data gathered reflected insights gained through prolonged engagement within the school context.

Credibility is also established through triangulation of data (Rodwell, 1990), triangulation describes and explains from different perspectives (Swanborn, 2010. p.160) through multiple measures of the same phenomenon. Within this study, approaches towards triangulation incorporated varied data sources involving teachers

and two educational consultants, as well as the diverse methods including, e-survey, interviews, a focus group and principal's journal.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability of information for the vicarious experience of others "is established through the purposive sampling method and the thick description provided in the case report" (Rodwell, 1990. p. 30). The use of Wiersma's (1991) "purposive sampling" also served to maximize the range of information collected since all teachers at RC were invited to respond to the e-survey and the high response rate (73.8%) provided a broad contextual base for interpreting other data sources.

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability in a qualitative study is concerned with the provision of relevant information so that other researchers can understand the rationale for the research methodology, and replicate the approach if appropriate. It also recognises that the research context is evolving and that it cannot be completely understood *a priori* as a singular moment in time (Jensen, cited in Given, 2008. p.209). It is believed that the methods used for this research study could be repeated in a different context and similar results could emerge.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is established through the objectivity of the findings. This relates specifically to how effectively data were collected; how well it was verified by both the researcher and the researched; and how clearly the context was described. In this study, this was achieved by utilising a critical friend as interviewer and ensuring that all interview processes were directed through her, rather than through me as researcher. Those involved in interviews had the opportunity to read their interview transcript and alter or retract all, or some of their contributions. Further to this, to ensure confidentiality, the e-survey was anonymous.

Ultimately, it is important to be procedurally ethical through maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of participants and taking an explicitly principled stance in the treatment of data. (Tracy, 2012. p.243). The use of coding of both

surveyed and interviewed staff assisted in increasing anonymity; however, it is acknowledged that, given the transparency of the researcher as principal of the school that was studied, the degree of anonymity was potentially reduced.

Deliberate approaches to meet Rossman and Marshall's 'Criteria for Soundness' included the triangulation of data, verification of transcripts by research respondents, the use of critical friend as interviewer addressed some of the power imbalance implicit between role of principal/researcher and that of teacher/interviewee as well as this, giving voice to teacher understandings about professional learning, was an empowering activity, for all who engaged.

3.8 THE RESEARCHER

As both researcher and principal of the case study school I was conscious of the dual roles of observer and participant within the study and as an insider and outsider. Sikes and Potts (2008. p.3) discuss the limitations of 'insiderness' and through their research have observed the dichotomy that exists from attachment to the site of study and the effects of unearthing it. As researcher, I was committed to working "with", and not "on" my colleagues (McNiff, 1988), yet also aware of the value-laden role of principal and the inherent power imbalance that exists, whether through perception or reality. As insider (emic) and outsider, as "marginal native" (Freilich, 1970), and researcher I was "intellectually poised between familiarity and strangeness, stranger and friend" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007. p. 89).

It is recognised that my existence as researcher and principal in my own school site inevitably affected the way in which respondents reported their opinions and understandings about professional learning. There was, therefore, a determined effort for me as both principal and researcher not to exploit positional superiority (Smith, 1999). The importance of the educational consultants who provided a more objective auditor role (Lincoln & Guba, 2005) through their interview observations was exemplified because of my dual role. Their view as outsiders gave balance to the insider's views that were expressed by teachers.

The choice of an Education Doctorate reflected my interest in practitioner or insider/outsider research where the candidate "is the primary agent of control"

(Costley & Stephenson, 2009. p. 183). The work-based learning approach implicit in professional doctoral research values context knowledge, insiderness and seeks to have a far-reaching effect upon the organisation that it is studying. Furthermore, the professional doctorate aims to contribute to professional development within a particular profession (Costley & Stephenson, 2009) and this was doubly important to me, given that my area of study was professional learning. The ultimate aim of this study was better understanding of teacher professional learning to lead to better practice in the field.

There are limitations to practitioner research and dangers about 'going native' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007. p.87) that were considered in the selection of an appropriate methodological approach. My role as principal allowed me to sit on the edge as an observer and, to step in to the site of research as a participant, but it also is a role of 'power' that invariably affected the way in which qualitative observations were shared. Nonetheless, the position of researcher afforded me a more objective stance, one which allowed enquiry, critical reflection and engagement from a distance. Given my own position as insider/outsider, the ability to undertake a critically reflective position was both privileged and complex. On the other hand, I believe the choice of Education Doctorate afforded insights and understandings about the RC context that would not have occurred, otherwise.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Simons (2009) reminds us that the fundamental ethical principle in all research, irrespective of methodology is to "do no harm" (p.97). This principle seemed even more essential as researcher/principal of the site under study with an awareness of the implicit power imbalance between those roles in relation to the teachers who were the primary participants in this study. As such, this study followed the established guidelines of the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Ethics Committee and was approved by the Board of Directors of RC who were regularly updated in regard to the process of data collection, treatment and interpretation.

Furthermore, participants were all volunteers and each signed an agreement prior to the commencement of research that outlined their understanding of confidentiality and privacy in relation to treatment of all data, they understood their ability to

withdraw from all or part of this study at any time and their work was subject to respondent validation (Simons, 2009). Bilby's (1997) four principles of ethical consideration were also applicable to this study. He states that: the consequences of a piece of research must enhance general welfare; educational research is an ethical matter and its purpose should be the development of human good; no risk of significant harm to an individual is permissible and respect for the dignity and self-worth of persons should take precedence over self-interests of researcher or other employers, clients, colleagues or groups (p. 116).

This research study sought to enhance the general wellbeing of teachers at RC through heightening their agency within their professional learning; in understanding the role of agency within teacher professional learning the study also sought to broaden existing knowledge for the potential betterment of education practices; participants were not placed at risk through the research processes and respect for their needs took priority over mine as researcher or principal.

Schwandt (2001) states that "the contractual conceptualisation of ethics lies in relations between researcher and researched" (pp. 74 -75). In adhering to these boundaries I was cognisant also of my role as principal and the importance of executing any power within my relationship with teachers carefully and respectfully. An ethical dilemma that Simmons (2009) raises is the importance of not diminishing participants' perspectives through the power the researcher owns, in being the builder of the case. Knowledge of these ethical dilemmas as well as strict adherence to the ethical guidelines under which this study was approved, managed and minimised areas of potential risk.

3.10 THE LIMITATIONS OF A CASE STUDY

There are limitations of the study that I foreground here. These are discussed under the following three considerations:

- Case study methodology
- Small research sample
- Researcher bias

3.10.1 Case study methodology

This case study sought to understand an aspect of education practice, that of teacher professional learning, in context, along with the multifarious factors that contribute to its success or failure (Simons, 1996). This examination occurred through viewing one slice of professional learning at a particular point in time. This can be interpreted as a weakness, since data were drawn from emotions, feelings and perceptions of participants (Gummeson, 2003) rather than from quantifiable measurements. Furthermore, in a single site with a specific context, it is possible that the findings are not universal, or able to be extrapolated to other schools and thus does not further the body of knowledge around teacher professional learning (Burns, 1996).

3.10.2 Small research sample

This study sought to gain insight and understanding about the effects of principal leadership upon the professional learning culture of the school under study and, the role of teacher agency as a catalyst for sustainable teacher professional learning in relation to the improvement of educational outcomes in that context. Response rates were high: 48 teachers of a possible 68 responded to an on-line survey, seven volunteer teachers were interviewed and formed part of a focus group session, and two educational consultants who had worked at the school site during 2010 were interviewed. Yet the small sample size can be perceived as both a limitation to the study, or as a strength.

The diversity of sources enabled a unique picture of the school in relation to its teacher professional learning culture that has implications for future practice within the school. The small sample meant that the study was very specific to the site, and generalisations to other school contexts may not be appropriate. Further, the interviewees were volunteers who had all been highly engaged in a pilot collaborative practices project that finished at a similar time to the data collection, and hence, already exhibited high levels of agency. It may have been more effective to have a research sample that comprised a contrast between engaged teacher learners and disengaged teacher learners.

3.10.3 Researcher bias

As stated earlier, I am both researcher and the principal of the school under study and thus I took up the role of both insider and outsider (Freilich, 1970; Sikes & Potts, 2008). Whilst a critical friend was used as interviewer, to decrease the effect of my dual role, it was not possible to eliminate the reality that the research data were not only for the researcher, but also for the principal. The teacher interviewees, in particular, were aware that their transcripts would be read by me, their principal. No doubt, this had some effect on their responses. Irrespective of relationship, there is an inherent power imbalance between principal and teacher attached to role, rather than person. It is also acknowledged that data that a completely external researcher might have gathered may have yielded different point in time information about teacher professional learning at RC

In choosing a critical friend as interviewer, I sought to reduce bias in responses and to create a more equal interviewer/interviewee relationship. Although I was not in direct control of the delivery of the questions I had formulated them and set up a directional structure. At times this meant that the probing or re-questioning that I may have undertaken did not necessarily occur.

In summary, the choice of an interpretative, exploratory case study within a qualitative paradigm has some limitations. Namely, the methodology lacks objectivity that positivists seek, the small sample size and the timing of the data collection create a restricted view of teacher professional learning and the dual role of researcher and principal created a potential power imbalance. It is argued, however, that the chosen methodology did not purport to be objective and placed value on the perceptions and views of those interviewed. The bounding of the case afforded a clear examination of the school under study, and as principal and researcher or insider/outsider, I gained a privileged insight and new view of teacher professional learning at RC. As articulated by Carter, Ritchie and Sainsbury (2009), the research approach allowed understanding, insight and the generation of new and relevant concepts about effective teacher professional learning.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This case study approach did not claim to be objective; it cannot be, given its heavy emphasis on participants' perceptions and judgments. Similarly, my reading of participants' perceptions and judgments was filtered through understandings of the world and indeed how knowledge is constructed. By ensuring credibility of data through a diversity of methods including a survey, semi-structured interviews, a focus group session, and my own reflective journal, comparative information assisted in developing a comprehensive picture.

It is argued that empowerment of teachers is fundamental to organisational learning (Hargreaves, 1994; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1998). The chosen methodological approach provided a strong vantage point from which to understand the extent that teachers' experience of empowerment and agency in professional learning within their school context was impacted upon by the principal's role in facilitating that learning.

Included within this chapter was a discussion of the research approach that was utilised, namely a single case study methodology. This research constituted a slice of time in the regular lives of seven teachers, two educational consultants for whom the site was a part-time workplace, 48 teachers who completed an e-survey and the principal, who was researcher. The methods used in the collection of data reflect the researcher's position in relation to collaborative practice, teacher agency, teacher leadership, and distributed leadership.

The chapter included a case study justification; explained the limitations of a case study; set the research context; designated the research sample; described data collection and data analysis; gave details regarding the criteria for validating the research; explained the researcher's role; outlined ethical considerations and concluded with a summary. A tabular summary of the research approach as it aligns with each of the two research questions was also included.

Chapter Four begins after these summaries and includes data collected from September to November of 2011. It also describes the key findings from the data.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter draws on data from a survey (n = 48), interview transcripts with teachers (n = 7), an interview transcript with two consultants who worked in the school during 2011, an interview transcript of the focus group comprising all seven interviewed teachers and reflections from the Principal's Journal. Included within the Principal's Journal is a summary of a general discussion with the critical friend/interviewer after the interview process had concluded. Some comments from this discussion are included within this chapter. Key themes and sub themes that emerged from these data sources have been used to organise this chapter and are discussed under section headings. Table 5 below summarises these five themes and sub themes.

Table 4.1 *Emergent Themes and Sub Themes*

THEME	DATA SOURCE/S	SUB THEMES
A. Time	Surveys Interviews	▪ Time as an enabler. ▪ Time as a constraint. ▪ Time for implementation. ▪ Time for sharing.
B. Agency	Surveys Interviews Principal's Journal	▪ Agency as freedom to choose and direct one's learning. ▪ Agency as learning empowerment for the collective good.
C. Collaboration	Surveys Interviews Principal's Journal	▪ Collaboration as a platform for school improvement. ▪ Collaboration as shared accountability. ▪ Collaboration as enjoyment.
D. Professional Learning inside the school	Surveys Interviews	▪ Learning from colleagues ▪ Enhanced by infrastructure
E. Principal's role in enabling effective professional learning practices	Surveys Interviews Principal's Journal	▪ Principal as builder of infrastructure ▪ Principal's attitude to professional learning

4.1.1 Theme A Time

THEME	DATA SOURCE/S	SUB THEMES
A. Time	Surveys Interviews	Time as an enabler Time as a constraint Time for implementation Time for sharing

It was apparent from both the survey and interview data that teachers perceived time as critical to enabling effective professional learning. They also recognised that lack of time is a significant constraint to effective professional learning. Furthermore, the data revealed a shift from teachers' initial understandings of professional learning as mainly incorporating offsite events such as workshops or conferences, to learning which can take place on site: through incidental conversation; sharing of practice; or in a structured forum. This new view of professional learning gave evidence of a re-imagining of time as a construct that can be viewed as an enabler, rather than a constraint to teacher professional learning because effective learning can take place in a diversity of circumstances.

From the surveys and interviews the amalgam of the themes revealed that teachers identified not only benefits (time as an enabler) and drawbacks (time as a constraint) of time spent away from the classroom at professional learning activities, but also acknowledged the need for time to be allocated upon return to their classroom role following a significant professional learning episode, to allow for reflection upon their learning. The teachers spoke of the value of time for reflection on their learning, as well as time for sharing their learning with colleagues, so that implementation of that new learning would be more likely to occur. One survey comment encapsulated this multi-faceted complexity of time: "Time is the only factor that I can identify as a weakness in the PD equation at RC but it is a complex issue." (TS#22) Each sub-theme is now further elaborated.

Time as an enabler

Teachers will, in the words of Consultant #1, "always talk time"; it is inextricably bound to teachers' perception of learning possibilities for both themselves and their students. It holds a powerful place within the psyche of teachers as indicated by Teacher #3 who stated:

> If I had a magic wand and a bottomless pit of money there would be one day a week for teachers to really be able to reflect on their practice, spend time going and reviewing others' classes …. However they choose to use it.

In essence, the data indicated that time enables teachers to learn, professionally. One respondent represented time as a commodity that can be traded with reciprocity – the notion of "if you give me time, I will repay with my own time". This was evident in the response of this Interviewee (TI#7) who stated: "I guess because we're allowed to go sometimes in school we often go in our own time as well." Another teacher concurred that professional learning occurs at RC because time is allocated, stating: "Professional Learning is valued very highly within the school. Time is allocated for professional development sessions through a range of different ways." (TS#9)

When the consultants were asked to identify outstanding professional learning they had seen in practice, they acknowledged a New Zealand school with a strong peer partnership program for its entire teaching staff. They recognised that the key to the success of this program was that the school dedicated significant teacher release time for the setting up of the program. One of the consultants also noted that the school "gave time" to teachers to engage in the project once it was established. These comments reinforce the idea that time can be conceived as a commodity that can be allocated as a means of enabling learning to take place.

Analysis of the data revealed that whilst professional learning is valued at RC, the way in which time is made available for learning is a contentious issue for some teachers who believe that it is apportioned unequally, or who find it difficult to spend too much time out of contact with their class or classes. Data indicated that parity of time for all teaching staff and the judicious use of time, ensuring relevance to personal and whole school learning goals were of interest to many who were surveyed and interviewed. If professional learning is to be supported and enabled within the RC context then the infrastructure support for time release in relation to professional learning requires careful consideration. Ideally this will allow time to be

viewed more positively by teachers as an enabler rather than as a constraint to their professional learning activities.

Time as a constraint

As discussed in the introduction to this section, time was identified as an enabler for learning, and, paradoxically, it was also represented as a constraint. Teachers identified lack of time for engagement in structured professional learning as problematic; an inequitable distribution of time where some are given more than others; or "wasted time, particularly when professional learning was too generic, or where there was no teacher choice". (TS#34)

As already noted, many survey respondents commented on the problematic way in which structured professional learning opportunities are allocated or offered at RC. They identified a tension between meeting their individual learning interests and the perceived competing, and more pressing needs to fulfil all aspects of the teaching role. For example, one teacher spoke of the "constant personal push to make sure all other tasks associated with being a teacher are completed" (TS#5), while another referred specifically to the student free days at the beginning of the school year (TS#1). This teacher (TS#1) identified that "greater consideration needed to be given to professional learning time allocation on pupil-free days when teachers have a prevailing need to get organised for the term ahead."

It was obvious that the need to fulfil the teaching role effectively takes precedence for many and professional learning was deemed by these teachers as "only beneficial if it doesn't increase workload when there is too much work already" (TS#5).The data indicated that many of the teachers viewed professional learning as an addition, albeit a beneficial one. The notion that professional learning should underpin their practice and be on-going was not shared universally amongst respondents.

The concern with workload was the primary reason for teachers' non-involvement in the voluntary collaborative learning project of 2011. Respondents spoke almost exclusively about a lack of time, rather than a lack of interest, in being involved. As discussed above, the sense of professional learning as additional to their role and only possible if time is allocated was clear in the responses of those who did not

engage in the collaborative learning project. For example, of the 48 survey respondents, 18 did not engage in the project. They identified "time"(TS#3), "time constraints"(TS#30), "lack of time"(TS#21), "mainly time constraints" (TS#24), "time issues"(TS#33), "fearful of over-commitment (TS#39)", "having plenty to do without this (TS#38)" and "(restricted) time availability (TS#42)" as the primary reasons for non-involvement.

The greatest dissent in relation to equitable support for professional learning at RC came from Teacher S#48 who believed that not everyone had been given fair access to learning opportunities: "it (professional learning) would be (valued) if we were all given the opportunity and time to attend. We should have some say in whether we believe we can manage time away from the classroom."

In summary, the constraints in relation to allocation of time for teacher professional learning, the release of teachers from teaching time, and the effective use of professional learning time, particularly when it is deemed generic, or corporate, were the primary issues raised by respondents in both the survey and at interview. On a positive note, it was observed that the seven interviewees identified time as an enabler, rather than a constraint.

Time for implementation

Whilst respondents directed much of their commentary in relation to time being an enabling, or constraining factor in relation to actual professional learning episodes, a number of teachers also indicated the need for greater infrastructure support for implementation of ideas after an episode of offsite professional learning. It is notable, however, that it was the consultants, rather than the teachers, who unequivocally identified the need to prioritise time for reflection as a tool for strengthening professional learning practices. Further, from their observations during the pilot collaborative learning project, it was the primary teachers, rather than the secondary teachers who demonstrated: "very, very deep reflection on their practice – possibly because time has been allocated for this purpose" (Consultant #1). In the consultants' view, an explicit and robust infrastructure underpinning the professional learning cycle is required at RC. Their view was that reflection following learning,

requires the allocation of time, just as time is granted for classroom release so that teachers can attend off-site professional learning activities.

Implicit in some teacher comments was frustration with the lack of opportunity to reflect upon or implement learning, or the knowledge that exists within the school but isn't shared in a cohesive manner. Teacher S#7 commented in the survey: "We need time to put what we learn into planning and implementation," and similarly, Teacher S#34 commented that "time is needed to be able to implement new knowledge and skills." Teacher S#38 had a further specific idea about implementation: "We report to our department about what we learnt, but it would be good if a couple of weeks later we were asked to share our implementation of those ideas."

Their statements indicated that at RC many teachers participate in relevant professional learning episodes but implementation of their learning is restricted because they become too quickly re-immersed into the prevailing and demanding culture of their classrooms. In effect, their comments indicated that the learning that occurs at conferences and workshops does not often translate into any change in practice. Conversely, one interviewee (T#04) reminisced about his first foray into professional learning that translated into a change in practice. His recount included reflection upon the strength of the impact of that experience. He countered his insights with the fact that this was the first professional learning experience of his teaching career and the profound effect of moving from nothing to what appeared to be 'everything'.

> It was 1995 and all of a sudden it was like, you know, a complete about face. Every staff meeting was about professional learning. The first was on Steven Covey's work, the next on De Bono's thinking hats, and then we moved on to Gardener's work in multiple intelligences. Suddenly this door opened for me – in the 18 months I was there, I did my best teaching and learning. I had to learn because they gave me a laptop too – this was early days. … They had fortnightly workshop afternoons – and you know I just soaked it up. My teaching changed

for the better. (TI#04)

The implementation of new learning as identified by Teacher #04 was perceived by those teachers surveyed and interviewed as a weakness at RC. In their view, this follow up phase is rarely allocated specific or dedicated time. To overcome this issue, teacher survey responses called for- "more time to be allocated to fully implement learning from professional development activities" (TS#13), or identified that whilst "time is always given to participate it is not always allocated for follow through." (TS#31) The findings would indicate that although time is willingly given to teachers to engage in professional learning for pedagogical improvement, change in practice is inhibited by a lack of time for implementation of that learning.

Time for sharing

Important, but less strongly identified, is the theme that related to the implementation phase of the collaborative practices project: sharing learning with peers. Teacher I#03 stated that "the rest of the school doesn't know what's happening in the learning sector and I wonder if teachers might be interested in hearing the information, or at least [knowing what presenters said about a particular topic]." It was suggested that an internal conference day could be a professional learning day, one that would involve presentations by staff members, celebrating and sharing their learning in a particular area. Teacher I#03's concern was that good quality professional learning is happening within the school but there is not strong infrastructure to ensure that it is shared effectively. Generally, junior staff seemed more concerned about the need for time for sharing, perhaps indicating a different interpretation of the role of the teacher – teacher as learner, rather than teacher as conveyer of knowledge. Teacher #03 emphasised that "through sharing, you understand your teaching better because there is an opportunity to reflect." In conjunction with this, she discussed the fact that teachers might also challenge that learning which leads to deeper reflection on practice and the possibility of changed practice.

The consultants also identified the powerful effects of sharing practices. Consultant #1 stated that "the best schools are powerful in sharing within the school as well as getting outside input." Yet the practice of sharing requires trust, according to the consultants, who noted that sharing would occur at its greatest effect in schools

"where it feels safe to be challenged." Teacher #05 also identified that "there's much to be gained in sharing", specifically she referred to the benefits of hearing from those outside of her subject area and age groups for teaching: "It was amazing the similarities that can be applied that you don't think of because it's a primary or early childhood strategy – yet it can still apply to you." It is apparent that sharing learning is identified as an underutilised tool with enormous potential for encouraging and strengthening learning practices. A different slant on the issue of time for sharing learning was raised by Teacher S#16 who stated that "there is not always time for follow up or sharing what we attended but it is also sometimes hard to listen to other people tell about their experience." This indicates that consideration needs to be given to the type of infrastructure to support the sharing of learning, as well as an appropriate approach to engaging other teachers within that sharing of learning phase. Essentially, time can be apportioned to opportunities for the sharing of new ideas and new learnings but this does not guarantee that the listening audience will be receptive.

4.1.2 Summary of Theme A Time

In summarising findings about this theme, it was apparent that time is a key construct which requires consideration and focus when seeking to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of teacher professional learning. Specifically, to enable teacher professional learning, the way in which time is allocated to various aspects of professional learning, needs to be considered. Some possibilities include: allowing greater time for attendance at PL events; supporting teachers to accept release time from their classroom; allocating time for reflection upon learning; and providing follow-up time for implementing new teaching for learning strategies following professional learning activities. Emerging from the findings relevant to the theme of time, was clarity in relation to the principal's responsibility to ensure school operations and infrastructure support a more constructive allocation of time towards professional learning.

4.1.3 Theme B Agency

THEME	DATA SOURCE/S	SUB THEMES
B. Agency	Surveys Interviews Principal's Journal	▪ Agency as freedom and empowerment to choose and direct one's learning. ▪ Agency as learning empowerment for the collective good.

It was apparent in both the survey and interview data that whilst teachers had a restricted understanding of the term 'agency', they had strong views in relation to their individual rights to choose their own professional learning activities. In contrast, the consultants demonstrated their broader understanding of the term. They described agency as a type of learning activism that can be both a shared or individual experience. At its ideal within a school context, it leads to improved teaching practices within the classroom. Further, the consultants identified their strong belief that without teacher agency, an embedded culture of effective professional learning culture will not be developed, nor will it be sustainable.

As a consequence of these differing ideas about agency, most of the findings tended to focus on teacher perceptions of individual choice, empowerment and autonomy in their professional learning, with a contrasting view arising from the consultants who viewed it as an action that can be shared, and can ideally lead to significant school improvement. There was evidence of the efficacious effects of professional learning episodes that were driven by teacher choice. However, some teachers preferred their learning to be flexible in structure but explicitly linked to the school's strategic objectives. When the latter occurs, the consultants identified the power of collective, rather than individual agency in teacher learning for changing practices within the classroom.

Agency as freedom and empowerment to choose and direct one's learning

Respondents indicated, both through survey and interview data, that 'agency' was important to them, or at its most basic interpretation, that choice in their own learning, was important to them. As discussed earlier, agency for teachers was

described as: “teachers having opportunities to choose and engage in professional learning activities that lead to a change in school and classroom practice.”

Almost three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that agency was “extremely important” whilst the remaining quarter indicated it was “very important”. It would appear from the written comments that accompanied this question that many of the respondents did not understand ‘agency’ in its broadest sense and were merely indicating their preference for having ownership of their own learning, through being able to make their own choices, rather than having them dictated. Few, if any comments drew a parallel between the exercising of agency in professional learning and changed classroom pedagogical practice. None of the survey respondents explored the concept of collective agency. Understandings by teachers about the exercising of agency in learning, was restricted to individual agency.

Similar responses were also evident from interview respondents’ comments, such as: “I feel it is very important for us to go to things that do interest us or are specific to our class or our needs.” (SN#02) “If I make the choice it belongs to me.” “So it’s about ownership.” (SP#04). KC#06 described agency as one’s “intrinsic motivator”. Another stated that “I feel it is very important to go to things that do interest us” (TI#02). These sentiments were also apparent in survey respondents’ general comments about what was important to them in terms of professional learning. They emphasised the importance of choice and autonomy in decision-making around learning. Their answers invariably indicated a first-person perspective.

For example, one respondent indicated the importance of making choices about what to do, and what not to do in terms of their own professional learning: “Allow us to choose what we do (and don’t do)” (TS#37). Another saw professional learning as valued and important, particularly because of the autonomy afforded for teachers at RC. “Professional learning is highly valued with teachers given autonomy for finding out what best suits their individual needs” (Teacher S#22). Teacher S#24 indicated that effective professional learning all “comes down to relevance and allowing one to make professional decisions.”

Reflections upon current professional learning practices at RC ranged from appreciation of the range of available choices to dissatisfaction with learning

episodes that were deemed irrelevant. For example, “Generally well-received, however [professional learning activities] must be chosen by staff themselves to be most effective and on a volunteer basis.” (Teacher S#35) Similarly, Teacher S#29 commented that “the general staff professional development does not include much choice in engagement.” Teacher S#10 also indicated cynicism about the general relevance of professional learning, saying: “I would like to see the long term advantages of extensive professional learning before committing time and resources.” It is evident that some teachers view professional learning as an optional addendum and not an underpinning of effective and improved classroom practice. In contrast to the teachers’ view about agency, the consultants demonstrated a much deeper view of the significance of individual agency as a means of creating change for school improvement. Consultant #1 captured this succinctly by stating “Teacher agency in their own learning is what makes the difference in the classroom.”

Agency as learning empowerment for the collective good

As discussed in the previous section, most respondents, whether from the survey or interview, were concerned with their own choices and ownership of *their* learning. Very few were led to consider the power of collective agency for bringing about overall school improvement, let alone individual classroom improvement. Whilst CS #02 identified the individual motivational effects of agency, she also identified that change in practice was a natural by-product:

> I think it’s (agency) crucial. It provides motivation for the learner. I know that’s how I feel, that it is my choice to study a particular thing or to be involved in a particular area. And like anything if you have the choice and the interest there’s a fair you know, percentage of your motivation and if you are working with other people who also have had the opportunity to choose to work in that area or with you or on that particular topic then you are in a pretty good place to make change.

A few of those interviewed also saw the necessity for agency to be shaped or aligned with school strategic directives and learning foci. The tension between individual

needs for agency whilst observing school initiatives was captured in the words of (TI#03) who said: “From a school perspective it’s really important to be part of some overarching professional learning but I think that having some sense of agency validates you as a professional and a teacher.” Similarly, Teacher (I#07) noted that at times it is “also important to influence or guide the selections of what is selected.” Teacher (I#04) was a little more guarded about direction-setting and demonstrated a view that individual ownership was of fundamental importance: “I suppose I do believe it has to be directed to a degree but on the other hand I think it’s about reflection on one’s own practice and deciding as a teacher on the area on which you need to focus and then taking ownership of that”.

The consultants took a broader view of agency and its relationship to collaborative learning practices. Consultant #1 identified the importance of such practices being fundamental to a school’s learning ethos or practices: “high levels of agency are evident when teachers work together collaboratively, but those approaches need to be embedded within the culture.” Furthermore, the same consultant saw agency as the vehicle for the generation of new knowledge and hence the platform for school improvement: “Agency allows new knowledge to be created – that’s what powerful professional learning is, it’s not just rejigging what is, it’s about creating new paradigms of learning.” (C#1) The critical friend/interviewer also noted agency as “having a multiplying effect” upon learning and school improvement.

In my journal reflections I include a conversation with an industrial advisor who works with the school who wanted my feedback on a professional development human resource package that his firm was offering clients. It was to be a six session PD (his terminology) with four different facilitators offering sessions which were to be limited to four to six participants. I asked the industrial advisor a lot about the outcomes the firm wished to achieve through providing the program. Particularly, I was interested in whether the aim was to build professional-identity or to engage the professionals in activity that would lead to organisational change. The following is an extract from my journal in relation to this conversation:

> Is the purpose to give the participant ‘agency’ in their own learning or for the agency to sit within the

> presenter's realm? At the time of discussion I visualised a sliding scale of agency and for the first time I really thought about agency as a commodity that can reside in a place or person or can be distributed. I was excited by the concept! (Principal's Journal, 2011. p. 24)

The discussions clarified my view of agency as being a dynamic that must reside within the learner, if it is to effect change in their practice. It is akin to the terminology of 'locus of control', that can exist within, or outside the learner, and have very different effects, depending on who is driving activity. Of note, is the challenge for schools to provide opportunities for teachers to exercise agency, whilst also setting parameters for learning that link with collective initiatives and shared goals for school improvement.

4.1.4 Summary of Theme B Agency

From the findings related to Theme B, it is apparent that teacher understanding of 'agency' was restricted, reflecting a view related primarily to having choice and freedom about one's own professional learning rather than seeing agency as also being a benefit to the whole school. The data identified that agency is seen more as an intrinsic motivator for teachers and a necessary ingredient within their own learning processes.

From the educational consultants' perspective agency is vital for the development and sustainability of a school's learning culture and the vehicle for change, sustained school improvement and the collective good, rather than just being of value to the individual.

4.1.5 Theme C Collaboration

THEME	DATA SOURCE/S	SUB THEMES
C. Collaboration	Surveys Interviews Principal's Journal	▪ Collaboration as a platform for school improvement. ▪ Collaboration as shared accountability. ▪ Collaboration as enjoyment.

It was apparent from both the surveys and interview data that many teachers identified beneficial effects of collaboration as an enabler for professional learning. Since the collection of data for this study coincided with the conclusion of the collaborative practices pilot project, thinking around collaboration terminology was at the forefront of many teachers' thinking. The seven teachers interviewed had been involved in the pilot program and their commentary demonstrated their preference for learning collaboratively and the enjoyment they had gained through the pilot project. For some, the effect of working collaboratively around a shared goal, was a newfound pleasure. Strong valuing of the relational effect of collaboration was identified, as well as the accountability inherent in working in partnership with another person. There was evidence of collaboration being deemed a vehicle for enlarging teachers' views of practices and pedagogies beyond their own classroom door.

The survey and interview data also showed that teachers recognised that, when engaged in professional learning activities, accountability and responsibility were heightened if they were working collaboratively with colleagues. As a result of this enlarged view, some teachers also identified the link between collaborative learning and school improvement. Each sub-theme within the theme 'collaboration' is now elaborated.

Collaboration as a platform for school improvement

Many of the interview and survey responses demonstrated that the collaborative pilot project that was completed just prior to data collection for the current study, had created a strong and positive impact upon the participants. A number of respondents were able to identify the benefits of collaboration in relation to their own professional learning and a few also identified the link between their own learning and whole school improvement. There was a clear delineation between the positive responses of the interviewees and survey respondents who had all been part of the pilot project; and the negative responses of those surveyed who chose not to be part of the project; and the more critical and objective responses of the consultants who had led the project.

For example, one of the strengths identified in relation to the collaborative learning and peer mentorship project in which all of the teachers in the research study were involved, was the 'sharing of practice' sessions that occurred periodically at staff meetings during the year of the project. Respondents reflected specifically upon how these sessions provided an opportunity to gain insight into what was happening in other sectors of the school. For example, while one survey respondent noted quite simply that: "It was really interesting listening to the final reports." (TS15) another, Teacher(I#06) saw the presentations as not just an opportunity to "see how people were going" but they were also important because "we saw how some people had some things pop up that had caused them problems, or had come across road blocks."

For many teachers, the sharing sessions associated with the pilot program were seen as a valuable commodity in learning about classroom practices. The sessions also provided awareness of the professionalism of their colleagues which collectively assisted in strengthening school improvement practices. "We need to be top of the range, as a school, and so we need to be working with people who shift your thinking" (FGF1) noted one participant in the focus group session. This was also indicated by, Teacher (I#03) who identified that there had been evidence of broader learning of all staff through the sharing sessions of research findings: "By people coming back and sharing with the groups we're all learning and gaining new knowledge and information; it stimulates ideas and thinking in you as a teacher."

The choice of opting to engage with the collaborative learning project was seen by many as a chance to be involved in school improvement that was larger than their individual focus. Teacher (S#9) specifically chose to explore "an area of concern that numerous teachers had raised", with the intent to be part of a team that investigated methods for school improvement. Another respondent (Teacher S#15) saw the opportunity "to find out about the rest of the school." Similarly, Teacher (S#19) thought that the collaborative project offered an "opportunity to work with others within the school and to better understand my work and theirs." The valuing of colleagues' practice was evident through many of the comments as well as a view that a more expansive understanding of one another's work assisted in engendering an interest in improvement. "I felt buoyed by the work of my colleagues and that

heightened my interest in working collectively for the betterment of practice" (Teacher S#19).

As well as these positive benefits, Teacher (I#07) saw collaboration as eliciting greater effectiveness in learning outcomes than would occur through her own individual learning practices. She stated: "I just love listening to what other people observe because it shifts my thinking a little bit. And if I was doing that as an individual then I would miss out on that influence which would be a shame and that would have a huge impact on the effectiveness of the outcome." Her response indicated a more generous view of learning within the school community, the sort of learning that can have a wider effect if it occurs through collaboration, rather than through individual pursuit.

Despite these positive responses about collaboration, the consultants identified weaknesses in the linkage between collaborative professional learning and school improvement. They identified a lack of strategic focus forming the basis for professional learning choices and a need for the professional collaboration that was occurring within the school to be better honed and "grounded in evidence and data of the actual site" (C#2). Furthermore, Consultant #1 identified the requirement of an explicit link to be made between whole school improvement and whole school responsibility for that improvement. Her notion of collaboration was much more expansive when compared with that of the teachers who were interviewed.

She drew from her own recollection of Hargreaves' metaphor about school teachers operating from an isolated egg crate classroom and saw the importance of teachers developing a much greater 'sense of 'our school' and what WE can collectively do.' One teacher (I#04) reflected briefly on this in his comment: "many teachers have this closed door policy, as if nothing exists beyond it." Consultant #1 also emphasised that teachers needed to develop an understanding that school improvement is not (solely) "the principal's job or the head of school's job, it's our job." She emphasised that "the concept of collaboration underpins powerful and effective professional learning" (C#1). The consultants suggested that a more explicitly shared strategic view might also lead to greater trust amongst teachers which would, in response, enhance the quality of collaborative practice.

In an email from the consultants received at the end of the project, they observed:

An excellent start has been made. However, consolidation and extension are required for real and embedded gains to be made. We recommend:

- *developing a clear strategic direction and plan for school improvement, including collaborative practices as a key element of professional learning. A range of senior leaders, HODs and teachers will need to be part of a strategic group to develop ownership and ensure a range of perspectives P-12.*

- *embed collaborative practices as part of teachers' daily work. We are happy to talk further. (*Consultants' email in Principal's Journal, 2011. pp. 8 - 9)

Conversely, teachers who did not elect to engage in the project placed greater value on getting their own work completed. They could not see value in working with others; their comments cast a myopic view upon how school improvement might occur, such as Teacher (S#31) who stated that spending time developing curriculum and planning units of work was much more beneficial than working with others. Another (Teacher S#36) had "more pressing departmental issues to attend to", whilst Teacher #S41 felt that the "very heavy work load" overtook the perceived benefits of collaborating with others. Even Teacher (S#27) who was involved in the project, only did so out of obligation when invited to join a group. "I chose to be part of the collaborative learning project because I felt obliged to, and other staff asked me to join their group."

This feedback regarding the benefits, or perceived benefits, of collaboration was elicited even though the survey did not seek such information specifically. It was apparent through the survey responses that many teachers perceived collaboration as beneficial for learning. That the majority of the 48 survey respondents had opted in to the pilot collaborative learning project also illustrated that staff valued its benefits, or perceived benefits. Whilst the data that reflected upon collaboration as a vehicle for school improvement was tied largely to this collaborative practices pilot project, the findings can be extrapolated further. There have been other specific collaborative projects at RC prior to this one, including optional learning circles for RC staff which

generated similar positive feedback. For example, in my Principal's Journal (2011. p.19) I refer to one such circle:

> There were positives – teachers working with
> teachers they didn't usually work with.
> Cross-departmental representation. Relevant
> skills – how to have difficult conversations.
> We had homework and learning partners.
> There was feedback to us. Modelling.
> Robust conversation.

School improvement was apparent through this particular collaborative learning activity, evident in stronger professional working relationships between the twenty teachers who chose to be involved.

It is evident that collaborative learning can support school improvement and some teachers are able to identify this connection. However, in general terms, there seems to be a predisposition of teachers to think of professional learning as an activity for the improvement of their individual practice although they are also able to identify collaboration as a means of enhancing their own learning and shifting their own thinking which may have a broader ripple effect. The consultants' views indicated a more explicit view of the school improvement agenda is necessary, and their comments urged the importance of a clearer articulation of this agenda as a platform for deriving greatest benefit from collaborative work of colleagues. In their words, "purpose is critical" to understanding why professional learning activities need to be undertaken within a school context (C#1&2). If teachers cannot identify purpose for their learning, they will not engage beyond the superficial or the mandatory.

Two further sub themes are now discussed: collaboration as shared accountability, and collaboration as enjoyment.

Collaboration as shared accountability

Responses at interview and through survey confirmed the accountability effect of working with colleagues towards a particular learning outcome. The survey and

interview findings indicated that accountability is heightened through collaborative endeavour, evident when there is a responsibility to meet deadlines with peers; a shared sense of purpose; or momentum that leads to greater action or engagement. Underpinning this data was reference to having a high regard for colleagues as being a crucial aspect of effective collaboration. In essence, many teachers identified a greater responsibility to complete tasks, when their colleagues were involved in the same project.

For accountability to be important in a collaborative setting, teachers require respect and regard for those with whom they are working. This was evidenced by comments made by those surveyed: “I value the opinions of my peers” (TS#10);”I wished to work with colleagues who had expertise in a specific area.” (TS#9); “I had much to learn from my partner and together we could help each other” (TS#7). Each of these comments indicates the importance of respect for peers and colleagues as a platform for effective collaborative learning.

The premise that collaboration requires an inherent accountability to others was apparent in comments made by teachers who did not become involved in the pilot collaborative learning program. Their comments indicated an understanding that collaboration demands a commitment of time. Teacher S#22 encapsulated this concept by stating: “Even though I have a strong belief in this form of learning, I felt my professional circumstances did not allow for this activity to be completed properly with full effort.” Similarly, Teacher S#14 thought that time expectations of a collaborative project could not be fulfilled: “Time was a primary concern, it was too challenging to find meeting times.” The interdependence between themes is also indicated in this comment. For collaboration to occur effectively, time needs to be made available (Theme A).

Further to the notion of time (Theme A) as underpinning collaboration, other respondents concurred that professional learning is an extra for which there is insufficient time, irrespective of whether it is collegial or individual. These teachers did not see value in what they perceived as irrelevant professional learning, rather they rationalised effective use of time in terms of unit preparation or meeting departmental requirements: “I did not participate as I felt I could spend my time

developing curriculum and planning units of work." (S#31); or "Too many other things to focus on and there were other departmental issues which seemed more pressing." (TS#36). One teacher (TS#37) "… could not see what use it would be to [him/her]." (TS#37). Each of these statements presupposes that teaching is predominantly about the mechanics of the role: fulfilling deadlines and creating curriculum, and that learning is the province of students, rather than teachers.

In contrast, others showed a thirst for learning and improving practice and it was their "ownership of learning" that was enhanced (C#2) by working with another and this was coupled with an increased sense of accountability to meet deadlines or create time for shared learning. Ownership may be viewed as empowerment, and thus align with the findings from Theme B, Agency. This was palpable in the comment made by Teacher (I#01) who reflected on her peer learning partnership with enthusiasm:

> It's so easy if you're doing something on your own to lose some momentum. But when you're in partnership and you actually set times to do something and it's just as important as a staff meeting, you make it. Like this is it and you meet at such and such a time on this day and that day. And we just, you just run with it and it was magical, and it's still magical, we're still doing it.

Accountability as a driver for learning, elicited through working collaboratively, was also indicated in the remarks by Teacher (FG#1) who spoke in the focus group session about being pushed to think differently as a result of collaborating, and about an accountability drawn from being attracted to working professionally with others who have "different eyes, different experience and greater passion and experience." Another interviewed teacher described collaboration as an intrinsic motivator for learning, the accountability of being committed to others, making learning more effective: "Studying on my own can be quite lonely - collaboration means that my learning is much more effective" (TI#07).

Working collaboratively requires a commitment to colleagues and a more public ownership of, and accountability to, one's learning. For some teachers this is daunting in an environment where the commodity of time is so precious, for others it

provides a platform for effective learning and enjoyment of that learning. Accountability to peers can be viewed positively, as a driving force for improvement, and thus, an important by-product of working together collaboratively. Those who engaged in the pilot collaborative practices project enjoyed being accountable to one another, rather than being forced to be accountable to a school, or mandated government initiative, for example. Whilst collaboration can at times be viewed as a mechanism of control, in this instance it allowed for collegial accountability, deemed by many to be both energising and enjoyable.

Collaboration as enjoyment

One positive aspect or by-product of collaborative learning that was highlighted by teachers was enjoyment. It was evident through responses that enjoyment of learning fulfils intrinsic needs for teachers such as personal efficacy within one's field of employment; the benefits of being part of a team, as well as the derived satisfaction from helping others to learn.

Collaboration as providing an enjoyable approach to learning was identified from a simple perspective as pleasurable, to a more complex level, where it was seen as a contributor to school improvement. This was seen in the comment by Teacher S#2 who said:

> I enjoy team work and the energy created when individuals share a passion to work together to 'solve' or at least address a problem in the hope that their efforts may effect change in student behaviour, learning culture, college policy or just explore possibilities.

In this comment the teacher recognises that, at its optimum, when learning is enjoyable and coupled with expertise and passion, it can lead to improvement in learning outcomes for students and have a broader impact upon the school learning culture.

This idea supports teachers observations such as: "I enjoy the benefits and joys of collegiality" (TS#6) or "To develop relationships with colleagues." (S#16) or the

enjoyment is in “grabbing someone else’s energy as well as my own” (TI#06). The valuing of colleagues and their wisdom is fundamental to effective collaborative practice: “But I just love listening to what other people observe because it shifts my thinking a little bit” (TI#7). The personal and professional gains in enjoyable collaborative learning are apparent in all of these remarks.

Collaborative learning endeavours provided opportunities for teachers to help their colleagues or to be helped by them. Consultant #1 noted that “in collaboration people are very strong at acknowledging in a supportive way, the strengths of each other.” This was also evidenced by Teacher (I#03) who observed: “Collaboratively it’s really nice to be involved with professional learning with other people because you can reflect and share information and share your ideas to assist their practice.” Teacher (I#07) valued “the conversational aspect as being so important to her learning.” Whilst Teacher (S#6) also identified the benefits of hearing from others, and sharing thoughts and opinions. This is evident in the response:

> I chose to be part of this year’s collaborative learning project because I enjoy learning and working with others rather than working on my own. I enjoy the benefits and joys of collegiality and I like to share and hear the thoughts and opinions of others -” (S#6).

Enjoyable collaboration is more likely to lead to more effective learning, whether at a personal level, or, at best, for a whole organisation.

4.1.6 Summary of Theme C Collaboration

Overall, in summarising findings about this theme, it is apparent that collaborative learning practices when linked explicitly to a clearly articulated school improvement agenda have the potential to support and sustain positive change. Collaboration is more likely to enable effective professional learning when peers value one another’s ideas, if teachers feel accountable to their colleagues and, if they enjoy learning collectively. The interrelationship between time (Theme A), agency (Theme B) and

effective collaboration was also made apparent. The consultants emphasised that collaboration needs to be embedded in daily practice and that it is the principal's responsibility to enable collaborative practices to be linked to a broader school improvement agenda, an agenda which is understood and shared by its teaching staff.

4.1.7 Theme D Professional learning from inside the school

THEME	DATA SOURCE/S	SUB THEMES
D. Professional Learning inside the school	Surveys Interviews	▪ Learning from colleagues ▪ Learning enhanced by infrastructure

The data collected from surveys and through interviews identified two sub themes that related to professional learning from the inside. The first sub theme identifies the importance of learning from colleagues in-situ. The second theme identifies the ways in which a robust professional learning infrastructure supports effective professional learning from within a school environment. The sub-themes 'learning from colleagues' and 'enhanced by infrastructure' are now further elaborated.

Learning from colleagues

The data indicated a broad understanding of professional learning, as well as an appreciation of the opportunity to learn from colleagues. It was evident that many teachers had an expanded view of professional learning, they saw it as an activity that can be school-based or held off campus. The pilot collaborative learning project assisted in this broadened understanding as was evident in the statement by Consultant#2:

> … from what limited observations we could make I think in the past professional learning was thought of as going out to professional development. In terms of sharing practice across the school and use of internal resources I believe that was not occurring in the past. It is [professional learning within the school] starting to emerge now.

Comments shared by both surveyed teachers and those interviewed, support a view of professional learning from inside as becoming more common at RC, and they also recognised it as having value. For example, Teacher (S#34) identified the value of another professional colleague commenting on classroom practice, as opposed to the 'general' effects of conferences, professional presentations and education articles. A newer member of staff made an interesting comment about the importance of 'insiderness' to understand a school's culture. This teacher, (Teacher S#17), said:

> I chose to be part of the project because I felt that people working around me understood more effectively the challenges, culture and clientele that comprise RC, than an outsider. Therefore they may have developed hard won and really pertinent strategies in the area I was interested in.

Surveyed teachers who nominated 'inside' professional learning activities that were of value, saw these activities variously as "an opportunity to develop professional relationships with other teachers" (TS#8); "Informal discussions within the staffroom" (TS#14); "visiting teachers classrooms and discussing aspects of their programs" (TS#16) or "Peer partnership with a colleague to focus on areas of my own teaching practice (TS#19). In the focus group session, one respondent (FG#M1) noted about his experience of the peer partnership: "I think at the grass roots level it just allowed for reflection and to review how one conducts oneself in a classroom – because we don't have that mirror that's held up against us day in and day out whereas this was an opportunity to do that." The importance of collaboration and the development of professional relationships with colleagues links effectively with the previous theme discussion: Theme C. Collaboration. It is also apparent that both formal and informal structures can provide a platform for learning from peers and that there are potentially strong learning benefits from this occurring. The recognition of this, reflects upon a broadened view of how professional learning can occur within a school context.

Yet, in comparison, survey data showed that some respondents had a strong preference for external workshops, skill-based hands-on activities and conferences as

their preferred professional learning. Two plausible reasons to explain this preference are that workshops are a commonly used approach to professional learning and therefore are more familiar and accessible as a genre to participants than other approaches, and that they are perceived as, or are, an effective approach to learning. Another reason is that the practical nature of many workshops is identified as valuable for teacher, as providing perceived or actual direct transferability of pedagogically-based workshop skills into classroom practice. Some examples cited by teacher respondents that support these ideas include:

> Hands on workshops where I was actively engaged in the Process and skills being delivered. Workshop presentations where practical ideas and activities were shared and modelled (T#9).

A second survey respondent stated a preference for "hands on workshop improving my IT skills for the classroom" (TS#35) whilst a third respondent deemed that from their perspective, the most effective professional learning for improvement in classroom practice are "workshops where you are actively engaging in teaching strategies that are applicable to a classroom situation" (T#36). Perhaps their preferences relate to the way in which professional learning has been normalised for teachers as outsourced and in the format of workshops or conferences.

One survey question was designed to gain an understanding of the type of teacher professional learning activities that transfer most effectively into improved practice within a classroom setting. Teachers were given eight types of professional learning activities and were asked to rank them on a five point scale that ran from 'extremely effective' through to 'not effective at all'. The workshop was identified by nearly two-thirds of the respondents as extremely effective, or very effective learning for transferral into improved classroom practice. Yet it was not the first choice of professional learning activity. Just over two-thirds of respondents identified collaborative learning projects as a learning activity most likely to transfer into improved practice. This was followed in preference by action-research projects which were identified by just over half of the respondents as extremely effective, or very effective. Collaborative research projects were given preference over conferences, with only half of respondents identifying conferences as extremely

effective, or a very effective means of transferral into improved classroom practice. It is also relevant to note that the proximity of collection of data for this study coincided closely with the conclusion of the pilot collaborative practices project. It would seem fair to note that this pilot project was influential in teachers' views of collaboration at the point in time of data collection.

It is evident nonetheless, that a predominance of the teachers surveyed and interviewed, do value the opportunity to learn from colleagues within the school, as well as gaining a repertoire of skills that are directly transferrable to the classroom. Whilst conferences are seen as an important means of professional learning, other modes were viewed as more beneficial. In particular, those teachers involved in the pilot collaborative learning practices project identified great value in their learning about themselves through working with their colleagues.

Learning enhanced by school infrastructure

The consultants identified the importance of infrastructure to support effective professional learning within a school. They cited infrastructure components including resources (particularly the allocation of time – see Theme A), planning linked to strategic school objectives, guided self-reflection, structures for sharing good practice across the school, support from external experts and leadership capacity-building as crucial to effective professional learning from the inside.

Consultant #1 described an effective professional learning culture as one that is:

> based on reflection, on-going reflection and being willing to challenge assumptions of how things are done and how they may be done better … a collaborative culture where learning is embedded in daily practice, not something that sits off to the side and not something that's *done* to someone.

The consultants identified that a robust infrastructure is required, one which allows for allocation of resources, particularly time, so that practice can be shared, as well as challenged and reflected upon. Consultant #2 saw evidence of sharing and supporting

practice within the collaborative practices pilot program but limited evidence of "questioning of practice, or challenging practice."

They also saw the need to plan for the way in which a changed approach to professional learning might occur, beginning with "resourcing towards it" and "planning around it" (Consultant #2). Further to this, they also emphasised alignment with "the strategic direction of the school". As an example of the importance of a robust infrastructure and planned approach to professional learning from inside a school, they identified how the collaborative practices project at RC was adversely affected in its initial stages by unforseen weather conditions. This was explained by Consultant #2:

> What we had intended with our work within the school was to start with the leaders of the school, however, that [coincided] with the floods and we couldn't actually get there to work with the school on the free days at the beginning of the year and we feel that caused a gap from the start.

As a result of this the leadership team and heads of department were not able to gain "a buy in through an understanding of intent and purpose" of the philosophy underpinning the pilot project and thus there was less "ownership" (Consultant #1) of the project from the outset. The consultants noted that in similar work in other schools, this 'buy in phase' was important in gaining maximum advantage from the program.

Perhaps influenced by the disjointed beginning to the collaborative practices project, both consultants viewed RC in its early stages of developing a professional learning culture where new knowledge was being created. To move beyond the known, into the new or unknown requires, according the consultants' observations, "scaffolded ways of working together" (Consultant #1) or "protocols where people sit down and share planning" (Consultant #1) or "scaffolded ways to get feedback from colleagues that feels safe and then having a practice of it that really helps" (Consultant #2). In speaking of another school they had worked in which had, from their perspective, achieved effective 'professional learning from the inside', they identified the critical

importance of “infrastructure support”, where the school “set aside time (see Theme A) and invested in the professional learning of people” and linked their work explicitly to the “school improvement vision” (Consultant#2). They also noted that “the *ongoingness* of external support was critical, being able to call people in when the need arises” (Consultant #1).

Whilst most teachers who responded through survey, or were interviewed were more concerned with their own individual learning, rather than a whole school approach, some identified weaknesses in the infrastructural support for professional learning. For example, two teachers highlighted the lack of follow up subsequent to professional learning sessions: Teacher S#1 saw the need for “follow up sessions to implement what has been learnt”, another concurred by saying “there is not always follow-up with what we attend” (TS#16). Again, the relationship between Theme A, that of time, and effective professional learning from within a school, was made apparent through the discussions of the importance of time for implementation of new learning.

Another respondent saw need for “a central PD focus for the year” (TS#12) whilst another noted “the challenge of access and time” (TS#39). The sharing sessions that formed part of the structure of the collaborative practices project were seen by one teacher interviewed within the focus group as an opportunity to view colleagues in a different capacity (FGF#1). The merit of “providing ongoing support” for collaborative learning, action research and peer learning partnerships was also identified as important, as well as having structures that allowed for gathering feedback from those “who didn’t find it as a really positive experience” (FGF#1) so that processes that needed improvement could be altered. Clearly, the provision of time (Theme A) is fundamental to the establishment of infrastructure support for effective teacher professional learning.

As was seen by teachers and consultants involved in the pilot collaborative learning project, as well as more generally in the way in which professional learning occurs at RC, the infrastructure does affect the quality of professional learning as well as its sustainability and its translation into classroom practice. An effective infrastructure for effective professional learning includes: clearly defined aims and links to a

school's strategic objectives; the allocation of appropriate resources, especially time; arrangements for sharing good practice across the school; support from external experts and a culture where reflection is embedded.

4.1.8 Summary of Theme D Professional learning from inside the school

In summarising findings about this theme, it is apparent that there was value in learning professionally from colleagues within one's own school context. The effectiveness of this learning was heightened when appropriate infrastructure support is in place. The ideal infrastructure takes account of learning that is linked to strategic school objectives; provides sufficient time allocation for collaborative work, as well as the sharing and observing of practice; and ensures that reflection time is set aside during all stages.

4.1.9 Theme E Principal's role in enabling effective professional learning practices

THEME	DATA SOURCE/S	SUB THEMES
E. Principal's role in enabling effective professional learning practices	Surveys Interviews Principal's Journal	▪ Principal as builder of infrastructure ▪ Principal's attitude to professional learning

The survey and interview data, as well as the Principal's Journal, identified two key ideas connected to the principal's role in enabling effective professional learning practices. The first theme related to the principal's responsibility to build an appropriate infrastructure for sustainable and relevant teacher professional learning. The importance of infrastructure support as an enabler of teacher professional learning was discussed in the previous section as part of Theme D. 'Professional Learning from the Inside'. The second sub-theme identified the importance of the principal being a demonstrated 'lead learner'. The two sub-themes 'Principal as builder of infrastructure' and 'Principal's attitude to professional learning' are now further elaborated.

Principal as builder of infrastructure

The teacher survey sought feedback regarding the ways in which professional learning could be better supported at RC. Some teachers believed that no change was required by stating: "at this stage we are providing adequate opportunities for staff to be involved at all levels of professional learning within the constraints of the budget" (TS#17); "None; opportunities for PD are well communicated to staff, offers are always present and in my experience professional learning is very well supported here." (TS#12) or "I think RC is quite generous in this regard" (T#20). Other teachers saw the need for changes in the support infrastructure, a task that the consultants identified as one that the principal is required to lead. Consultant#2 said: "The principal needs to provide the infrastructure support, they need to foster the middle managers and the teacher leaders, and they need to provide opportunities for sharing and highlighting growth and progress" (Consultant#2).

The areas identified as important in building a more robust internal professional learning infrastructure were identified through the survey, rather than the interview data, and included: attention to time release for engaging in professional learning; time for reflection after the event and planning for and implementing changes; greater autonomy in choosing learning activities; and a more explicit structure around sharing learning. Identification of these issues has been discussed previously in relation to other themes. (See Theme A. Time, Theme B. Agency, Theme D. Professional Learning inside the School). How these stages of professional learning might operate at RC requires collective engagement as well as consideration to the way in which time, agency and collaboration (Themes A, B, C) can be utilised to support effective professional learning from inside the school (Theme D).

In my Principal's Journal I also noted that "one cannot take someone else's professional learning model and cast it into one's own school and expect it to operate as effectively." I noted that many factors need to be considered within the infrastructure including:

> … teacher agency, teacher buy in and teacher ownership. One can lead from the top but

> not push with a heavy hand. Where does
> [this] type of learning fit within our values,
> or our strategic plan? How does it link with
> a school improvement agenda?
> (Principal's Journal, 2011. p.21).

As is apparent, the principal has a significant role in facilitating and supporting the conditions that foster effective teacher professional learning within a school. The consultants viewed infrastructure support as encompassing many facets including: clearly articulated links between professional learning and a school's strategic vision; allocation of resources including time; structures for sharing learning; and fostering leadership of learning via middle managers and teacher leaders. The teachers saw infrastructure improvement as tied most closely to the way in which time can be allocated for learning and the follow up and implementation of that learning. It is interesting to note that whilst the consultants viewed the establishment of this infrastructure support as the clear responsibility of the principal, the teachers had a less definite view of where the responsibility lies. Their interest in the principal's responsibilities in relation to effective teacher professional learning was linked more closely with affective qualities of passion, engagement, interest as evident through 'leading by example'.

Principal's attitude to professional learning

The interview data indicated the significance of the principal's attitude in establishing an effective professional learning culture within the school. In comparison, teachers when surveyed, did not make any specific reference to the importance of the principal's attitude to professional learning. The survey data collected that refers to the principal's effectiveness or ineffectiveness as a lead learner, tended to be specific to me, thus at times within this section, there is a departure to first person language. The qualities of the principal identified within the data as important to enabling effective professional learning practices include: leading by example; being supportive of others' learning; currency of knowledge and passion for learning. This effect of attitude was also evident in a general comment by one consultant who noted that the principal's role "is extremely important as a model" (Consultant #2).

Consultant #1 described my strengths as "definitely commitment, enthusiasm and professional knowledge and her own demonstrated ongoing professional learning so she's an excellent model", which concurred with Teacher (I#06) who also identified effective principal qualities as someone who demonstrates their engagement with their own learning:

> to me someone who drives herself the way
> she does I just think as teachers we need to
> be up to speed with current research regarding
> all sorts of components of education and the
> roles that we are in.

Both consultants also identified specific weakness in my leadership practices, with reference to my relative inexperience in the role [at the time of data collection I had been principal for two and a half years] and thus my reduced ability to support coaching, mentoring or capacity-building in other teachers. Consultant #1 noted: "You know a principal early in their role is not as likely to be intent on developing the capacity of others because they're actually developing their own capacity to do the job." The interviewer concurred with this remark also, noting that: "in a new job I figured it took me about four years to get the hang of it … before I could start to look forwards". Nonetheless, even with evident inexperience as the principal of RC there were attributes and attitudes to professional learning that teachers and consultants identified as important, such as: "Teachers want to know that their leaders are good teachers – and there is no doubt here" (Consultant #1).

The teachers who were interviewed appeared to appreciate that their principal leads by example as a learner, perhaps as a lead learner. For example, Teacher (I#04) encapsulates this by saying: "I've always looked for guidance to people more experienced than I am and you know she leads by example in that particular area." The importance of leading by example was also highlighted by Teacher (I#01) who reflected on a principal from 1984 who was undertaking his own PhD on questioning and how his example spurred her on to consider "the types of questions I asked within my own classroom." The interviewer summarised this view of lead learning and shared it with me after the interview sessions:

> I did take some notes here about probably your attitude, that you are professionally respected. And then that you are a role model for ongoing learning – so yes as principal you clearly support and lead the culture of professional learning.

Another attribute identified by teachers as important to enabling an effective professional learning culture is that of being supportive of others' learning. Specifically, Teacher (I#05) cited with favour, one of her former principals who "actively offer[ed] opportunities and [made] you aware of them, or to go to something current," She also saw "[me] as making a constant offer of professional learning opportunities and being open to engagement in [relevant learning opportunities]." This same teacher stated that she felt enabled by my "attitude towards her professional learning; "as well as encouraged by her sub school head who says: "Just go. Go and learn." In contrast, Teacher (I#02) suggested the negative impact of a previous unsupportive principal at another school who "didn't let [her] have any outside influences … he would just stand up and tell us what we should do."

The principal's currency of knowledge was also deemed an important enabler of effective professional learning practice. Teacher (I#05) stated: "I think [our principal] is very much for professional development in fact she is the one who believes that you need contemporary knowledge." My own further study was also seen as influential: "I see [our current principal] as being really supportive of the professional learning that we're interested in and I guess seeing her go on and do additional studies is also reflective of her attitude towards it" (TI#03).

The final attitudinal trait identified within the data relates to the importance of the principal's passion for learning. Consultant #1 referred to my 'enthusiasm', Teacher (#06) referred to positivity towards learning, whilst Teacher (#07) said, "… and she's a very passionate educator but she is just as passionate about us being passionate … she has taught us a lot about the importance of learning."

4.1.10 Summary of Theme E: Role of principal

For the study it was found that in order for effective professional learning practices to take place, the principal must a) provide appropriate infrastructure support and b) demonstrate a positive attitude towards teacher learning. Infrastructure support includes allocation of resources for learning, especially the provision of time. Time for a learning episode, time for reflection after that episode and time for planning, implementation and sharing were all considered important. Further to this, teachers identified the value of agency as provided by choice in their learning activities, rather than learning that is dictated 'from above'. Teachers who were interviewed expressed their view that effective principals lead by example, support others' learning, have currency of knowledge and also a passion for learning. The consultants concurred with these views and also stressed the fundamental importance of professional learning having purpose, being tied to a school's strategic and organisational aims. They also saw the principal's role in building capacity in other leaders within the school as fundamental to sustainability and growth of an effective professional learning culture.

4.2 FINDINGS CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter explored the findings from the research conducted at RC in 2011. It drew together the four data sources including interviews with seven volunteer teachers both individually and in a focus group setting, interviews with two educational consultants who worked at RC in 2011, surveys of 48 volunteer teachers, as well as my own reflective journal. The five key themes that emerged from the analysis of this data included: - time, agency, collaboration, professional learning inside the school and the role of the principal as an enabler of teacher professional learning. Specifically, it was found that the first theme, time, can be an enabler or a constraint in creating effective conditions for teacher professional learning. The simple provision of time is not sufficient: - time needs to be allocated thoughtfully, and in direct relation to learning phases. Specifically, time is needed at implementation of learning following a significant professional learning activity. Implementation of new knowledge requires reflection, thinking and planning time. Further, some teachers noted that time for sharing learning is valued and valuable.

The second theme of agency as a tool for effective teacher professional learning was also identified. Explicitly, agency was seen as the enactment of choice in learning which was empowering and ultimately, at its best, created a better learning environment for all. In direct interrelationship with the themes of time and agency was the third theme of collaboration. Many respondents identified the value of collaboration for their own learning but spoke of the importance of providing time for it to occur. Respondents also acknowledged that collaboration elicited a heightened sense of agency. The consultants also viewed it as valuable individually but saw its broader importance also, namely as an essential platform for school improvement. Further, many respondents identified that collaboration led to higher accountability in relation to undertaking and fulfilling learning projects whilst a high number also spoke of the enjoyment factor inherent in effective collaboration.

It was apparent in the findings from the fourth theme that of professional learning from inside a school that appropriate infrastructure support must be built to enable its enactment. Specifically, the themes of time, agency and collaboration were interrelated within the identified infrastructure components. Through the provision of time at different phases of learning, teachers were able to collaborate and to exercise agency. Teachers valued the opportunity to learn from colleagues as well as time to reflect, plan and implement new knowledge within the classroom.

Finally, the fifth theme identified the principal's role in enabling effective teacher professional learning. The educational consultants explicitly acknowledged the vital role of the principal in establishing infrastructure that supports teacher learning. Whilst teachers did not identify this in their survey or interview data, they did highlight the importance of the principal as a lead learner, someone who positively engages in professional learning and actively supports teachers' positive engagement.

Through the findings there was evidence of an almost uncontested belief that professional learning is both a valued and valuable commodity at RC, as well as being fundamental to teacher professionalism and effectiveness of classroom practice. The key findings and implications around each of the five themes are discussed in the following chapter.

The Discussion Chapter, Chapter Five, draws on literature from Chapter Two to discuss the findings of this study in relation to school improvement through an effective model of teacher professional learning. Specifically, it discusses the two underpinning research questions by examining the processes that enable or constrain teacher agency within professional learning in a whole school context, and the principal's role in influencing the development of professional learning for teachers.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study sought to understand the professional learning culture of an independent Kindergarten – Year 12 girls' school, situated in regional Queensland. Particularly, the interest was in the effects of principal leadership upon the professional learning culture and the role of teacher agency as a catalyst for deep, sustained teacher professional learning leading potentially to the improvement of student educational outcomes. A body of research literature supports the argument that sustained school improvement can be facilitated by building teacher capacity through strengthening their personal agency within their professional learning. Of interest to this study therefore, are the structures and conditions, established by the leadership of the principal that can have an effect on teacher agency.

Initial discussion in this chapter centres on the two research questions that underpinned the study, and draws on the key themes that emerged from the findings. It compares and discusses these findings in relation to previous studies and literature as outlined in Chapter Two. It also considers the findings in light of the theoretical framework that underpinned the study, which drew from the work Crowther (1994 to 2011) and, to a lesser extent, that of Logan and Dempster (1992).

Following the discussion of the two research questions, a revised version of the model for teachers as agents of school improvement is put forward (see Figure 5.2).

5.2 REVISITING RESEARCH QUESTION 1

This section commences by addressing the first of the two research questions for this study:

Research Question 1. *What processes enable or constrain increased levels of teacher agency within teacher professional learning in a whole school context?*

Discussion of this research question begins by considering the key findings regarding the identified enablers and constraints of teacher professional learning within a whole school context. The importance of teacher agency is considered first, followed by a discussion of the enablers of teacher agency, and finally the constraints that impede

teacher agency. There are some commonalities between the enablers and the constraints as the findings of the research point to fluidity between the two categories. That is, depending on levels of support for, or pressure to engage in, professional learning, elements such as time, resources, principal leadership and organisational infrastructure were identified as being positioned along a continuum between enabling and constraining.

Four of the five themes that emerged from the findings chapter are going to be discussed here as key enablers of teacher agency. In other words, teacher agency is enabled when: time is made available to teachers for professional learning; teachers are able to exercise choice in their learning even when it is tied explicitly to school improvement goals; teachers work collaboratively to create new knowledge or examine existing knowledge and practices; professional learning occurs from inside the school and the principal supports teacher professional learning through attitude, example, resource allocation and other appropriate infrastructure.

An essential premise of this study was that effective and sustained teacher professional learning is linked to teacher agency within that process, a view that is supported by researchers such as Darling-Hammond, 1999; Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008; Invargson & Anderson, 2007; Sachs, 2003. To better understand the perceived enablers of teacher agency at RC, the opinion of teachers at RC was sought, via an e survey and through teacher interviews. I also tracked my own changing perspective of teacher agency through a reflective journal. Teacher agency is fundamental to effective professional learning, and the research findings revealed that while individual agency was recognised and valued by teachers at RC, collective agency was yet to be developed sufficiently as to be readily recognisable to, or experienced by teachers. Thus, whilst the importance of agency was evident for individuals in this study, the literature indicates that collective agency is fundamental to whole school improvement.

5.3 ENABLERS OF TEACHER AGENCY

Four key enablers are identified here and the discussion commences with time.

5.3.1 Time (derived from Theme A)

The theme of time presented as both an enabler and constraint of professional learning within the three data sources that constituted the data bank of this study. Time is a construct that has enormous presence within teachers thinking about their work. Consultant #1 stated that teachers "always talk time". How they talk about it and how they view it, therefore, needs serious consideration when time for learning is under deliberation. The allocation of time provides both pressure and support for school improvement through effective professional learning. Time is a finite resource and therefore needs to be carefully structured, fully respected and utilised to suit the circumstances of the context in which it is governing. Dufour and Marzano, (2009, pp. 64 - 65) identify the need for "time for collaboration to be embedded into the routine workweek" of teachers and counsel against principals engaging in "evaluation of teachers" which they view as "a low-leverage strategy for improving schools". Rather, they support the work of the principal in facilitating schedules to ensure that teams meet "for at least one hour per week."

Throughout the data, this theme presented as the greatest paradox in the development of an effective approach to professional learning at RC. Teachers lamented lack of time, sought more time, revelled in the opportunity to spend time learning, and acknowledged the need to dedicate time to reflection after a significant professional learning episode. It is the latter point in regard to the way in which time is allocated after a professional learning episode that presented greatest interest to teachers.

Traditional views of professional learning tend to focus on the externally-provided conference, workshop, seminar or other in-service activity as the provider of knowledge about teaching and learning and hence the conventional key to changing or improving practice. Yet the implementation, sharing and reflection phases after such events require much greater attention as well as the allocation of significant time investments. For teachers to be agents of change with regard to their practices, they require time and the motivation to use that time. Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell, Mockler, Ponte and Ronnerman (2012, p.133) refer to the importance of creating "dialogic conditions that allow varying views and beliefs to emerge." Deeper professional knowledge will not develop from a single episode of learning they

suggest; rather it requires time to be a privileged and revered aspect of the infrastructure that directs a teaching and learning change project. Similarly, Caena (2011) in a literature review of quality in teachers' continuing professional development, emphasised the importance of teachers having "time to think, analyse and talk about what students are learning and doing" (p.14).

In addressing the issue of time, there are implications for school principals from a budgetary perspective, since time is a significant cost commodity within the school context. To be blunt, to free teachers to learn at a deeper and broader level requires a significant commitment of funds. Ironically, money is often invested in mandatory, school-directed professional learning activities external to the school without consideration about how those dollars could be used for professional learning within the school, and often for greater numbers of teacher participants. Crowley (2013. p. 144) views "planning time and time for effective personalised and collaborative CPD" as essential to effective teacher professional learning. One interviewed teacher referred to the ineffectiveness of professional learning where time is given to attendance but not for pre-planning, sharing, follow up or implementation.

Indicated in the analysis of this issue is the importance of a robust infrastructure that underpins the release of time so that it is utilised effectively and contributes positively to the broader learning culture within the school. Crowley (2013) attests that a "considerable body of research" into effective professional learning includes the provision of reflection time in conjunction with collaboration with colleagues with whom teachers, teach.

Similarly, Bredeson (2003), in writing of optimal conditions for workplace learning, describes five methods of utilising the critical resource of time. Namely, he writes of "freed-up time" through the provision of substitute teachers; "restructured time" through changing the school day; "common time" via organisation of teachers' timetable to facilitate shared spares; "better-used time" through more careful use of currently scheduled meetings; and "purchased time" achieved through hiring additional staff (p. 99).

Thus, time can be imagined in different ways and can be structured or restructured to optimise conditions for teacher learning. The way in which time is utilised as both a

pressure and support for teacher learning and ultimately for school improvement is an area that requires due consideration. Between these points of tension lies potential teacher agency or Hattie's (2012. p. 86) 'activator', that is, teachers who can be catalysts for learning improvement. In essence, when applied appropriately within a school context, time is perhaps the greatest enabler of teacher agency within their learning. From a practical perspective teachers need time for learning. To derive greatest benefit from time, teachers also need to view it as an enabler of learning, rather than as a constraint.

5.3.2 Collaboration (derived from Theme C)

Collaboration between teachers is identified in the literature and through the findings as fundamental to their agency as learners. At best, collaboration in learning empowers; allows for the exercising of choice; provides opportunity for activity in affecting change and heightens individuals' belief in their ability to make a difference (Frost & Durrant, 2004). Day (1999. pp. 97 – 98) advises that school improvement is unlikely to occur without evidence of teacher agency within the process of change. He notes that the change process is further enhanced by a collaborative sense of agency.

Hoyle's (1974) discussions of "restricted" and "extended" professionalism also reflect this difference between a single classroom-based perspective and a broader, more interconnected or collaborative view of the role of a teacher within a learning community. Extended professionalism, in a collaborative setting refers to greater power to act, or liberation through choice. This sentiment of liberation through collaborative agency is reflected in comments made by some teachers at interview who identified agency beyond self, and for the greater collective good of the whole school community. At best, collaborative learning, particularly cross-departmental learning, has the potential to extend teachers' views and their agency from individual to collective.

Both the findings and research in the field of teacher professional learning (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Ebbutt, 2002; Fullan, 2007) identify key characteristics of effective professional learning that link very clearly to teacher agency through collaborative learning activity. These characteristics include the

extension of skills through engagement, inquiry, experimentation, collaboration, sharing, modelling, coaching and research. This terminology links with that used by the seven teachers interviewed when they were asked to summarise their experience within the collaborative practice pilot program where teacher agency was found to be high. The terms used were: “self-directive improvement”, “motivation and empowerment” which ultimately was “validating oneself as a professional and a teacher” (from interviews). Hattie (2012. p. 41) would deem this as evidence of high self-efficacy and, when this occurs, teachers are more likely to engage in challenging situations, make a strong commitment to the attainment of goals and enlist personal agency.

The benefits of collaboration are identified in the literature around school improvement and effective professional learning (Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Duignan 1997; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009; Sergiovanni, 1994). The National Mapping of Teacher Professional Learning Project Report of 2008 (Doecke, Parr, North & Gale) identified ‘best practice’ approaches to teacher learning as including collegiality, collaboration and inquiry-based research. These best practice approaches are consistent with the observations of the teachers interviewed, each of whom was involved in the collaborative practice pilot program. Hattie’s research (2012) in relation to improvements in student learning, identifies that teachers working together collaboratively is the most powerful strategy for achieving this.

Similarly, McLaughlin (2010) writes of the effectiveness of networks of schools that collaborate in research, identifying their strengths in: “reducing teacher isolation; enhancing collaboration between teachers; bringing about change, possibly on a large scale, through the sharing of practice, knowledge and joint problem solving; using research to facilitate these processes; and enhancing feelings of well-being among teachers” (p.155). The heightened self-efficacy derived from collegial and collaborative work by teachers in the current study was identified as ‘enjoyment’ or ‘joy’ and led to more energy and productive outcomes. In essence, through collaboration which involved active research and choice, teacher agency was heightened, particularly at a personal level.

It is argued that for teachers to have greater levels of agency within their learning, they need to view themselves as subjects rather than as objects within that learning (Logan & Dempster, 1992). To concur with this, the seven teachers interviewed in the study identified their own high levels of engagement within the collaborative practices pilot program where they experienced choice, discovery and the opportunity to critically reflect upon their own practices related specifically to their own work. Few teachers referred to learning activities outside of the school in the same way.

The survey responses of teachers when asked to describe their understanding of professional learning as a collaborative enterprise comprised a plethora of verbs, including but not limited to, the following: - "on-going", "improving", "upgrading", "reflecting", "sharing", "collaborating", "gaining", "improving" and "enhancing". The choice of verb reflects a positive view of professional learning as a collaborative process and an engagement of self within that process. It is the engagement of self as learner that indicates agency and choice in expansion of one's professional behaviour as described by Imants (2002) and ideally, the expansion of collaborative professional behaviour.

According to other writers in the field (Bollam, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Van Driel, Beijard & Verloop, 2001) the challenge is to create circumstances within a school where collegiality or collaboration is not contrived, not driven from a heavy-hand at the top, nor as a non-negotiable expectation. Van Driel, Beijard & Verloop (2001 cited in Groves & Wallace 2007. p. 6) also caution against a top-down approach to professional learning for staff and emphasise the importance of teachers as participants within their own learning. Similarly, Spillane (2002) emphasises that for teacher learning to be real and sustained then approaches to professional development need to be well researched and facilitated effectively from within the organisation, not singularly from the top. Professional learning from within the organisation implies distributed learning and for heightened teacher agency this indicates the importance of a collaborative approach.

The pilot collaborative practices project at RC that was the focus of much of the interview data for this study, was simultaneously a bottom up and top down project. Teachers were invited to participate; hence they exercised choice and agency in their

decision to become involved. The parameters for involvement were designated from a leadership level but the way in which teachers worked, designed their project and the frequency of their meetings became self-generated. For those who participated, the 'what' was mandated but the 'how' was collaboratively developed and allowed for varying degrees of teacher agency to be exercised.

Research indicates that collaboration forms an essential base of school improvement. Harris (2010) in writing of school improvement in Wales stresses the importance of a professional learning community as the pillar for school improvement and reform, a place where teachers work together collaboratively. Cordingley & Needham (2010. p. 96) caution that "there are no silver bullets. It's taken about five years in total to develop a culture of enquiry and significant sense of cohesion or collaboration amongst a key group of people in the school."

In 2007 when I was in the role of deputy principal I surveyed teachers about their experience of the professional development days that had started the school year. I gained insight into a picture quite different from what I had imagined. Instead of embracing the opportunity to hear an expert in the field of adolescent behaviour, for example, many teachers were concerned about the lack of choice, the imposition on their time and the lack of direct relevance to their specific teaching context; they wanted time to prepare for the new school year and time to plan with colleagues. This simple survey led me to a more targeted approach to professional learning, one that has taken significant time since then, and that led to this study.

Whilst both the teachers and the educational consultants who were interviewed in this later research agree that collaboration is valued at RC, it was the consultants who saw it as departmentalised, or effective in some sections of the school, rather than shared across the whole school. There is, as Cordingley & Needham (2010) identify, no short cut to developing a shared collaborative learning culture. That the notion of collaboration underpins powerful and effective professional learning is not contested. Consultant #1 stressed that a more explicit sharing of the strategic view is needed which may also lead to greater trust amongst teachers which would ultimately enhance the quality of collaborative practice.

Therefore, structures that support conditions of trust, real opportunities to collaborate and a clear sense of strategic purpose are fundamental to the development of teacher agency within learning. The absence of such structures clearly constrains teacher agency and hence effective teacher learning. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009. p. 70) emphasise the importance of a willingness to collaborate, and to do so in relation to the things that "really matter for schools, students and broader society." It is apparent from the findings that in the pilot collaborative practices project in 2011, where there was a high level of choice for participants and where they were empowered to explore previously unchartered professional boundaries, there was high agency. This was further strengthened through the collaborative and collegial structures put in place that supported their learning.

5.3.3 Professional learning from inside the school (derived from Theme D)

There are many opportunities for teachers to learn professionally and effectively within the school workplace. Bredeson (2003) describes this as "job-embedded learning" (p. 92) and he writes of ways in which professional learning from within a school context can be the key to raising student achievement from within a learning-enriched school community. This aligns with the work of Crowther (2011) who maintains that school improvement will only be sustained if capacity building occurs within a school. His work with Hann, McMaster and other researchers and practitioners in developing the IDEAS project is based upon the premise that schools must revitalise themselves through effective professional learning within the school context (p. xv). In addition to this, Muijs, Kyriakides, Van der Werf, Creemers, Timperley and Earl (2014) stress the importance of teachers taking control of their own learning through self-regulation (p.246) or through personal agency, so that their own learning is not divorced from the students who they are teaching.

The findings of this study revealed that teachers at RC place value upon the importance and inherent strengths of learning within the school context. One consultant noted that previous views of professional learning were limited to something to "go out to do" (#2) but this was now no longer the case. According to Barth (2002. p. 84) "the most reliable, useful, proximate, and professional help resides under the roof of the schoolhouse with the teaching staff itself" and it is this concept of 'insiderness' that requires attention for positive, sustained organisational

growth and improvement. The ways in which RC teachers learn in-situ demonstrates the sensitivity to context that McWilliam (2002) believes is essential to authentic teacher professional learning. Similarly, Barber and Mourshed (2007. p. 30) refer to a study of the best school systems in the world that identified 'job-focused and collaborative' professional development as the key to improvement of classroom practice.

Likewise, Dufour, Dufour and Eaker (2009) have revisited their work in relation to professional learning communities and highlight the value of quality collaboration, research and dialogue that is practice-centred and based upon inquiry that is job-embedded and contextually specific. This value was identified in the findings, particularly through the interviews, where the seven teachers were able to recognise the benefits they gained personally from being involved in the collaborative practices pilot project, either as part of an action research group or within a peer partnership. Their level of agency correlated with the level of perceived relevance to their classroom practice and was further heightened because choice about their learning was offered. The benefits of such 'job-focused professional development' has been identified by Barber and Mourshed (2007. p. 30) in their writing around high-performing schools.

Effective professional learning from inside a school cannot be defined by one model (Bredeson, 2003. p. 97) for all. Rather, it must be context sensitive, directly aligned with the needs of students with whom teachers are teaching (Muijs, Kyriakides, Van der Werf, Creemers, Timperley & Earl, 2014. p. 246) and sustained by appropriate infrastructure that aligns with school values, supported by principals who value teacher professional learning, and incorporate collaboration that is authentic. When these conditions exist then professional learning from inside the school can be highly effective.

5.3.4 Principal's role in enabling effective professional learning practices (derived from Theme E)

Effective teaching professional learning practices need the support of "everyone who has a place in the chain of influence from policy to practice" (Muijs, Kyriakides, Van der Werf, Creemers, Timperley & Earl 2014. p.249). At the heart of the chain of

influence is the principal who plays a critical role in enabling appropriate conditions for teacher professional learning to occur, effectively. Bishop, (2011. p.28) in writing of effective leaders, emphasises that "principals need to inspire collective efficacy" and he adds that this requires, "a clear sense of purpose." Purpose, needs to be articulated clearly and to be supported through the establishment of effective infrastructure. Enabling principals are well-placed to do both. Through effective infrastructure and a shared purpose, Sergiovanni's (1999) dual concept of organisational support and teacher autonomy can be facilitated whereby principals ensure appropriate infrastructure empowers teachers to exercise autonomy, or agency within their professional learning.

As discussed earlier, an emerging theme from the findings of this study and supported by the literature is the importance of apportioning time to critical reflection following a learning episode so that effective implementation and consolidation of that learning can occur. Many of the teachers who responded at survey or interview identified the need for infrastructure support for time for collaboration, and also for sharing, reflection and implementation of learning. Without this, the quality of learning is likely to be reduced and agency is transitory. In my reflective journal I recounted a moment of realisation about the importance of critical reflection for embedding learning, after attending a professional learning breakfast and by the end of the school day had forgotten the topic discussed.

It was at this moment of realisation that the need for critical reflection to occur as part of the teacher professional learning process was reinforced. The development of school structures to provide both support and pressure for this provided another level of reflection. Imants (2002) in writing of this reflection stage describes it as central to teacher professional learning, a view supported by Burridge, Carpenter, Cherednichenko and Kruger (2010. p.24) who state that praxis inquiry demands that practitioners reflect post-event on their practice. The concept of reflection is invariably included (see Darling-Hammond, 1999; Frost, 2000; Mayer et al., 2005; Newmann, Youngs, Grove & King, 2000; Turnbull, 2005) as a means of embedding new learning within a teacher's context (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008; Invargson & Anderson, 2007). To enhance school improvement, therefore, off campus professional learning activities need to be accompanied by a thorough focus on

follow-up activities so that the transfer of learning can be catered for more explicitly. Feedback and reflection are crucial to the process of embedding new learning into the teacher's own context (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008, Invargson & Anderson, 2007. p. 48).

Time for learning requires careful co-ordination to ensure sustainability and the same co-ordinated approach needs to be given to professional learning, of which 'time' is one component. It is not enough to give time in the way that one gives money for a conference:- it needs to be embedded within a professional learning infrastructure where time is visible in the following phases: identification of learning required, specific professional learning phase, post-learning reflection, sharing, implementation and further reflection. At many of those stages, collegial interaction will heighten the learning and associated agency within that learning. Mores, when teacher professional learning is contextualised and occurs in-situ, deeper critical reflection is strengthened through being in the company of colleagues (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2011).

Further considerations for principals seeking to establish and enable effective professional learning practices can be drawn from contemporary understandings of principal leadership which tend to support a distributed, non-hierarchical structure whereby leadership is mobilised in others (Cranston & Ehrich, 2008; Durrant, 2004; Fullan, 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The distribution of leadership, nonetheless, is much more than dividing and distributing work. The great man theory has been replaced with leadership for sustainability (Lambert, 2005) where, when distributed effectively, and with significant letting go of responsibility by the principal, there is such growth in teacher leadership that "teachers and principals become more alike than different" (p. 40).

Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002) and Moller and Katzenmeyer (1996) write that as teachers develop greater authority and levels of responsibility, it is the principal, not the teacher, who has the greatest influence on the acceptance of teacher leadership as a viable model. Principals also have a responsibility to be the lead learners, as well as learners who lead others to learn. Fullan (2002) identified this concept of sharing and building knowledge as indicative of principals who are cultural change leaders. In my reflection on professional learning at RC over the past

decade, I have come to the conclusion that change of practice and school improvement lie ultimately in the hands of teachers in the classroom. This may seem a self-evident truth but it is a truth nonetheless. The inherent challenge is that it is my responsibility as principal to support and create conditions that enable teachers to understand their responsibility and to have the tools to develop and improve pedagogy.

Yet Consultant #1 who spoke about teachers needing to develop an understanding that school improvement noted that it is not (solely) "the principal's job or the head of school's job, it's our job." The seven teachers interviewed identified the importance of the principal's leadership as a learner as well as the gains made through their own opportunity to select areas of learning autonomously. They spoke consistently of the engaging effect of a principal who is passionate about learning and its positive cultural influence.

In the debriefing session between the interviewer and me, as both principal and researcher, the interviewer identified that the teachers who were interviewed described high levels of agency within their learning at RC: - they "felt they had choice, they felt supported, valued, and resourced appropriately." In the view of the consultants, the distribution of leadership through capacity built in others, is the fundamental role of the principal and an enabling role for teacher agency. It is not sufficient for teachers to feel valued, enabled and supported – they must also have sufficient agency to act, and to do so as leaders, rather than being led. Their agency needs to operate within a shared space, a place where the strategic and school improvement goals of the school are shared, explicit and valued. It is incumbent upon those who have a leading role in the professional learning of teachers, particularly school principals, to ensure that it is encouraged and supported so that it can be enacted effectively within the school.

5.4 SUMMARY OF ENABLERS OF TEACHER AGENCY

The findings of the study indicated that teacher agency was enabled firstly when the resource of time is utilised to its greatest advantage and Bredeson's (2003) notion of freed-up time; restructured time; common time; better-used time and purchased time are considered (p. 99) in relation to structuring time for teacher reflection, planning,

implementation, sharing and further reflection of learning. Secondly, it is strengthened when teachers are able to work together collaboratively and with choice in developing new knowledge and understandings about their work. Through collaboration there is potential for a heightened sense of being able to make a difference (Frost & Durrant, 2004), greater accountability to peers rather than hierarchy, empowerment through choice and learning enjoyment, all of which contribute to teacher agency. Thirdly, when teacher professional learning occurs effectively within the school context and teachers can see the direct relationship between their learning and that of their students, agency is enabled. Finally, the principal has a critical role to play in enabling teacher agency within teacher professional learning through the provision of appropriate infrastructure support as well as a demonstrated personal interest in professional learning.

In summary, it was apparent that the findings are supported by the literature (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002; DuFour, Dufour & Eaker, 2009; Fullan, 2002; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009; Logan & Dempster, 1992) in relation to key factors that enable heightened levels of teacher agency within teacher professional learning. Specifically, according to the literature, these include school provision of infrastructure support in relation to time for all phases of learning; teacher engagement in authentic collaborative learning practices that involve choice and relevance to classroom practice; learning that is contextually focused and situated; principal support of teacher professional learning through appropriate organisational infrastructure as well as ensuring teacher learning is linked explicitly to school strategic direction.

These factors are aligned with those identified in empirical studies undertaken by Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald and Bell (2005), Turnbull (2005) and Forrester (2000) where principles that support teacher agency were described as:-

- Teachers learn through interactions and activity of relevance to their own practice and context;
- Alignment occurs between teacher development and school development goals and shared philosophical understandings;
- Collaborative practice or networking opportunities is evident;

- Critical, reflective practice engages teachers at a deeper level of thinking and a deconstruction of practice and;
- School leadership is distributed, rather than hierarchical.

The ways in which teacher agency was constrained in a school is now discussed.

5.5 TEACHER AGENCY CONSTRAINTS

Both surveys and interview findings placed far greater emphasis on enablers of teacher agency, than on constraints. Nonetheless, key findings generated from the study, aligned with the literature and identified that teacher agency is constrained in the following situations, namely, when time is viewed as constraining rather than enabling; when there is non-alignment between professional learning and school strategic direction and when there is poor infrastructure support for teacher professional learning. As well, the research literature would indicate that where leadership is hierarchical and leadership capacity-building not in place, then agency is constrained and not sustainable (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Searby & Shaddix, 2008; Watson, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The constraints to agency are now discussed in more detail.

5.5.1 Time (derived from Theme A)

As discussed in the previous chapter, time can be conceived as enabling or constraining teacher professional learning. When ‘lack of time’ (Bredeson, 2003) to learn is the perception of teachers then there is a significant absence of agency experienced. Further, the data identified that some teachers viewed inequitable distribution of learning time between teachers, wasted time, and some teachers identified the angst wrought from having time out of the classroom when important student learning is taking place and needs to be outsourced to another teacher, less skilled in a particular subject area. Of note was that within the data teachers referred to lack of time for, rather than lack of interest in professional learning.

Some teachers described the pressure created by expectation to spend ‘more time’ in professional learning whilst others merely wanted to find time to learn, but couldn’t. Further to this, teachers described a need for a more formalised approach to time in relation to professional learning. In essence they indicated a need for time to be

clearly set aside following professional learning episodes to enable sharing, discussions, reflection and implementation of ideas. Without time designated and structured coherently, levels of disengagement and frustration erode agency. Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) urge that 'space' for reflection or implementation or sharing needs to be provided within the school day, or these important aspects of learning become a punishment rather than a productive process.

5.5.2 Non-alignment between teacher professional learning and school strategic direction (derived from Themes D and E)

Themes D (Professional Learning inside the School) and Theme E (Principal's role in enabling effective professional learning practices) clearly indicated the importance of appropriate infrastructure within the school to support effective professional learning. The consultants emphasised that it was the principal's responsibility to build the infrastructure. In keeping with this, the consultants saw that the alignment of school improvement goals and teacher professional learning goals with philosophical goals was of great importance in this study. It was also seen as a weakness in practice at the time when the study was undertaken. Some teachers also identified frustration with too much choice of professional learning without sufficient direction. A few teachers wanted more follow up subsequent to learning episodes so that professional learning that was billed as a whole school focus was sustainable.

The importance of aligning teacher learning with school goals and values is seen as fundamental to school improvement. Hargreaves (1994. p. 436) emphasises that such learning needs to be situated within the context of the school: "To improve schools, one must be prepared to invest in professional development; to improve teachers; their professional development must be set within the context of institutional development."

Characteristics of outstanding schools are identified within the literature as schools that are: research-engaged (Ebbutt, 2002), based upon a culture of inquiry (Fullan, 2007), learning communities (DuFour, 2011); and ones that provide "high-quality, collaborative, job-focused professional development" (Barber & Mourshed, 2007. 30). The processes required to support effective professional learning and hence increased teacher agency, were identified by the educational consultants who place

emphasis upon the principal's responsibility to ensure that a clear articulated strategic direction, a school improvement plan, and a strategy for developing capacity in others are in place. In their view, weaknesses in these areas are restricting teacher engagement and hence the growth of a robust professional learning culture.

Teacher agency is described as a dualistic concept by Dietz and Burns (1992) as simultaneously enabling and constraining. The challenge for principals and leaders is to organise learning opportunities in such a way that the school's values, mission, strategic direction and school improvement agenda are honoured, without constraining individuals' agency within their own learning. Apparent from both the findings and strongly supported by the literature is the notion that alignment with organisational goals for learning enables teacher agency, and it would seem reasonable to surmise that where there is non-alignment between organisational goals and teacher professional learning, that teacher agency is constrained.

5.5.3 Poor infrastructure support (derived from Themes D and E)

Common to the findings of this study was a clear indication that infrastructure is needed to support a more robust teacher professional learning model. Without a structured scaffolding of learning, teachers feel deprived of opportunities to share, collaborate and reinforce knowledge. Teachers in the current study were able to identify a number of occasions where lack of infrastructure led to reduction in teacher engagement, for some a feeling of alienation from colleagues and for others a frustration with learning without purpose. For example, Teacher S#18 identified a lack of awareness of colleagues learning as symptomatic of a random approach to professional learning activities. Another teacher recognised, (Teacher #31) the importance of follow up after professional learning activities and Consultant #2 highlighted the urgent necessity for "infrastructure support" to underpin an effective professional learning community. Such responses reflected deficits within the current infrastructure which thus had the effect of reducing levels of teacher agency and, in turn, lessening learning opportunities for not only individuals, but for the school as a learning organisation.

Hargreaves and Goodson (1996. p. 171) emphasise the concept of teachers as agents in their own knowledge development as vital for organisational learning, but also

make interesting observations about the role of 'infra-organisational' support within this context. Several writers have argued that relationships come first, (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1996. p. 171), culture second (Fullan 1993) and structure third when thinking about school improvement and organisational learning. For example, Fullan (1993) suggests that to develop one attribute in isolation is dangerous practice. Relationships support the possibility of risk-taking, challenging the known and a healthy culture supports the resistance that is almost inevitable (Loader, 1997). Finally, structures support the processes and when grounded in theory, allow for sustainability of organisational learning. Although, Fullan (1993) extends this idea, he warns that whilst organisational learning is a strong intellectual inspiration for change, schools must not become places where improvement inspires 'endless change'.

Even in situations where learning is highly relevant and inherently valuable, agency can be reduced or diminished because of poor infrastructure. Turnbull (2005), in a study of six pre-service teachers, their supervising teachers and visiting lecturers, sought to ascertain levels of teacher agency in the students' learning experience on practicum which was a context of great personal relevance and importance to pre-service teachers. It was found that only half of the pre-service teachers exercised agency within their learning. They identified such inhibitors as absence of teacher support, a rift in philosophical understandings about education, a lack of distinction between teacher and pre-service teacher which reduced professional dialogue and a lack of modelling by the supervisory teacher. Even with opportunities to learn in a context of high relevance, there is still a diversity of factors that can affect levels of individual agency being exercised, and hence the perceived effectiveness of the learning experience. Poor infrastructure constrains agency, and infrastructure varies from school to school and from teacher to teacher depending upon their experience, their needs and their perspective.

5.5.4 Limited leadership capacity-building (derived from Themes D and E)

Themes D (Professional Learning inside the School) and Theme E (Principal's role in enabling effective professional learning practices) plainly signposted the importance of learning from colleagues (see Theme D) and the principal fostering leadership capacity-building through middle managers and teacher leaders (see Theme E).

At interview, the consultants identified weakness in the level of capacity-building for the leadership of learning at RC. They perceived it as a significant inhibitor in teacher and collective agency within the learning process. Whilst they did identify the principal as someone who leads with passion, conviction and enthusiasm they stressed a need for other leaders to take greater responsibility and be enabled to take greater responsibility for the leadership of learning. They envisaged this as being founded in two principal-led approaches or attitudes: - 'letting go' and also building capacity and hence agency in others through more targeted mentoring and coaching. This concurs with the work of many theorists and researchers engaged in the moving paradigm of principal leadership (Crowther, 2010; Frost & Durrant, 2004; Fullan, 2002).

It is argued that for leadership of learning to occur in a sustainable way it needs to be distributed deliberately in an effort to genuinely share the responsibility (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006. p. 139). Whilst the principal may be described as the fulcrum of school leadership, the responsibility for the enactment of effective learning needs to be owned, shared and distributed actively, rather than tied to hierarchical models of position. Without a model of shared leadership, or Crowther's 'teacher leaders' then teachers are constrained in their exercising of agency within their own learning. The survey data indicates teacher frustration with professional learning that is too generic, or deemed irrelevant to their circumstance, driven by the leadership of the school, rather than the teachers themselves. One teacher comments: "a professional makes the decision to take part when it is relevant and necessary to their learning."

Contrary to this teacher's view of professional autonomy is Moller and Katzenmeyer's (1996, p. 3) perspective that teachers have traditionally socialised as followers, rather than leaders and this is also evident in the findings. Teachers at RC did not refer to themselves as leaders of learning. Their focus was about the school leaders setting up the context for relevant learning, rather than them displaying ownership of learning leadership. The traditional predominance of equal, non-hierarchical structures amongst teachers can be counterproductive to the development of leadership and professional learning structures that are required to naturalise teacher leadership as a worthy concept.

This can be deemed as a constraint in agency, with teachers dependent upon others to lead. Whitty (2011) in his foreword to Robinson and Timperley's text "Leadership and Learning" reinforces the authors' view of the importance of distributed leadership as crucial to supporting optimum student attainment. Whilst Robinson and Timperley acknowledge the highly complex relationship between leadership and student outcomes, they emphasise that principals alone cannot drive improvement, it is an area of leadership that needs to be developed and shared.

The two consultants identified a number of times during their interview, that greater distribution of leadership and capacity building of staff is needed for sustainability of teacher learning practices. As principal I am required to share leadership of learning and build capacity in others whilst acknowledging that this may run against the mainstream of traditional principal/teacher leadership constructs.

Since teacher agency is a critical factor in the sustainability of learning then it is evident that teacher leadership is a necessary partner. Both are processes which inform each other's practice (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009, p. 178). It is the principal who has the greatest influence on the acceptance of teacher leadership as a viable model (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Haan, 2002. p. 64, Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996). To place the teacher at the heart of leadership of learning does need organisational support that allows for space and place for a reconfiguration of role, and an envisaging of that role. The principal's responsibility to lead this will be discussed in relation to the second research question.

Whilst Hargreaves and Fink (2006) contend that leadership is by nature distributed within and beyond the school context, that it does not need to be distributed; it already is (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006) provides an interesting counterpoint. However, it is the quality of that distribution that was an identified weakness at RC. This weakness, in turn, constrains teacher agency within teacher professional learning as part of a whole school.

5.6 SUMMARY OF CONSTRAINTS

In summary it is apparent through the findings and the literature (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Bredeson, 2003; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002;

Fullan, 2002) that a number of key processes constrain teacher agency within teacher professional learning. Specifically, these constraints are apparent when: the resource of time is not distributed appropriately for individual teacher's needs; when there is non-alignment between professional learning and the school strategic direction; when there is poor infrastructure support for full teacher professional learning; and when there is the need for increased leadership capacity-building. Each of these constraints needs to be addressed in order to harness and grow teacher agency within teacher professional learning.

Having finished this discussion of research question 1, the second research question is now considered.

5.7 REVISITING RESEARCH QUESTION 2

How and in what ways do school principals influence the development of professional learning for teachers in a school?

Answering this research question begins by considering three key findings related to the ways in which school principals influence the development of professional learning. These findings include two broad categories: personal attributes of school principals who are able to transform professional learning cultures and communities and organisational attributes since a successful school leader brings together both the configuration and the culture of a school, or melds the personal and the organisational.

Within this discussion, broad principal attributes including the personal attributes of modelling learning behaviour with passion, and the enabling of others are discussed. Further, the organisational attributes such as the alignment of the strategic vision and school improvement plan as well as the provision of both pressure and support (time, resources) of learning are explored. The Principal attributes sit well against the Australian Professional Standards for Principals (p.6) that specifies that principals lead and manage through:

- vision and values;
- knowledge and understanding; and
- personal qualities and social and interpersonal skills.

5.7.1 Personal attributes

Principal attributes that positively influence the development of professional learning for teachers in a school from a personal perspective are now discussed. These attributes are described as: modelling effective learning behaviours, with passion and enable and build capacity in others.

Modelling effective learning behaviours, with passion

The data collected from the teachers, through the survey and interviews, highlights the importance of the principal modelling appropriate learning behaviours, and doing so with passion. This aligns with the large international research project conducted by Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford on successful principals (International Successful School Principal Project, 2001) and the work of Fullan, (2014) in writing of how the principal can maximise their impact.

The notion of leading learning refers to the modelling behaviours required of successful principals. Day and Gu (2014. p. 213) in writing of successful principals in challenging contexts, identify the importance of principals who are willing to take risks in a prevailing compliance environment, risks that allow for the strengthening of "moral good" for all learners. Furthermore, they also recognised the role that passion plays in enthusing others. This 'passion' was also identified by Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford, (2005. p. 539) in their work, they state simply, but clearly: "You need a passionate person in charge." In a similar vein, Dufour and Mattos (2013. p.40) in writing about the way in which principals really improve schools, stress the importance of leaders who create a school-wide focus on learning. Teacher I#3 when interviewed, said, for example:

> I see her as being really supportive of the professional learning that we're interested in and I guess I see her going on and doing additional studies is also reflective of her attitude towards it. That it's ongoing … and you never really stop.

Another teacher (TI#07) noted in discussing my leadership attributes: “She’s a very passionate educator but she is just as passionate about us being passionate.” Whilst another teacher (TI#01) reminisced about the qualities of a former principal whose modelling of learning behaviours has been influential in her own learning: “…it was the fact that HE was doing his own study that engaged you, that was the influence then.” These comments highlight the positive influence of principals upon teachers when they model positive approaches to learning.

Fahey (2013) describes principals who “think like teachers”, as facilitators of distributed learning across the whole school, by example, identifies the following four qualities as fundamental: “purpose, eagerness for learning, clarity about who they are as learners, and courage.” (p.68) Two of the four qualities identified by Fahey relate directly to the principal modelling learning behaviours – with passion. Fullan (2002) also identifies a characteristic of principals who are change leaders as those who are willing to create and share knowledge. Furthermore, it is deemed important that the leader is seen as a learner, with a real capacity to learn (Hoog, Johansson & Olofsson, 2005. p. 604). Leithwood (2005. p. 621) also spoke about “walking the talk” and modelling values and practices as a means of developing capacity in others.

Yet passion alone is not sufficient as a means of leading other learners. Fullan in writing of the way in which principals can maximise their effectiveness emphasises that “passion matters but must be earned through actually getting better at leading change” (Fullan, 2014. p.125). Additionally he notes that “leaders with deep passion are sometimes blinded by their fervour and thus do not remain alert to evidence that could cause them to rethink how they might approach a given situation more effectively” (2014. p.133).

It is not denied that the principal needs to be passionate in her valuing of learning for all, as well as modelling learning behaviours. It is, like other characteristics of effective professional learning, one aspect that cannot work independently of others. Likewise, the principal cannot work independently of staff and their development and the building of their capacity is a vital component of the jigsaw. “I can’t influence others merely by my own passion.” (Principal’s Journal, 2011. p. 15).

Nonetheless both the literature and findings indicate the positive effect of a principal who leads learning skilfully, and also does so with passion.

Enable and build capacity in others

It is argued through the literature (Cardno, 2008; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002; Dinham, 2005; Fullan, 2014; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Timperley, 2011) and through this study that for teacher professional learning to be at its most effective, distribution of leadership needs to be spread across the school community. The quality of distribution of leadership is imperative (Dinham, 2005) and this quality is more likely to occur when teachers and principals have a shared interest in the development of a learning culture of which they have been a pivotal part. Sustainability of leadership of learning is inherent in distributed leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006. p.139) and when leadership is shared effectively it is easier to bring about change through a broader support base (Stewart, 2013). Fullan (2014; p. 109) would argue that "the best way for people to change is to do it themselves, and to learn from others similarly engaged." Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002) emphasise the principal's pivotal role in growing and enabling teacher leadership to support the development of effective professional learning cultures and communities. This is further noted by Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002) who state: "Where teacher leadership flourishes, principals actively support it and encourage it" (p. 33).

In the interview data, the two consultants identified the core importance of the principal building capacity in others in order to bring about improvement in teacher learning and hence student learning. Consultant #1 emphasised that capacity building in other teachers ensures sustainability of a learning culture because there isn't "vested power and influence in one person". Timperley (2011. p. 145) writes of an allied term for capacity building as "learning-centred leadership" where learning is distributed through the distribution of leadership across the school. Similarly, Cardno (2008) suggests that effective leadership can best be linked with practices that improve teaching and learning. Cardno emphasises that school leadership in the 21st century requires a non-linear, non-hierarchical approach; this is one that is built upon communities that are willing to learn together and as individuals.

Whilst the teachers surveyed and interviewed did not identify the need for greater enabling and capacity building in the leading of learning, they did identify a strong sense of individual agency within the learning culture of the school. It was evident that they felt part of the learning culture, or as subjects rather than objects within it. Teachers were conscious of their own capacity being built through their learning. The educational consultants at interview nonetheless identified a need for broader capacity building and acknowledged the important role of the principal in leading this through mentoring and coaching her direct reports, so that they could spread the same approach with those for whom they have direct responsibility. The ripple effect of building capacity requires sharing but the principal is pivotal as the catalyst for this to occur most effectively and Crowther (2002) sees principals who are unable to share leadership as the greatest impediment to school reform.

The relationship between principal and teachers affects levels of teacher agency, as Groundwater-Smith and Campbell (2010. p.201) write: "(partly) the issue of teacher agency rests upon the nature of the relationship between teachers as practitioner researchers and those who may support them." How teacher input occurs within professional learning choices and structures within a school reflects upon the principal's leadership and their view of teacher leadership within their school context. It was apparent in the findings that the teachers who had engaged in the pilot collaborative practices project in 2011 had derived personal efficacy from the experience and their capacity as teacher leaders was built, irrespective of their awareness of that occurrence. The decision to undertake the collaborative practices pilot program was, in part, providing a vehicle for building capacity across the teaching staff. In my journal I wrote in relation to this: "It is all part of a collective process of building a culture and building capacity" (Principal's Journal, 2011. p. 22).

The concepts of principals and teachers leading learning together or distributed leadership or collective efficacy are powerful ones and have been the focus of work by Crowther and other researchers and practitioners (1994 to 2011) within a number of Australian schools over the last two decades. In an empirical study of teacher perceptions of best practices in professional learning Crowther and Gaffney (1994) found that old methods of professional learning based upon deficit models were no

longer considered relevant by teachers, rather, the common thread identified was a belief that teachers need to have agency or decision-making in their learning, whether as individuals, collaborative groups or as a profession. It was highlighted through this study and through the research finding that principals have a pivotal responsibility in facilitating and supporting best practices in teacher professional learning. It is an attribute that deserves attention and nurturing. "The message for leaders is to build professional capital as part and parcel of passion and urgency" (Fullan, 2014. p.132).

5.7.2 Organisational attributes

Principal attributes that positively influence the development of professional learning for teachers in a school from an organisational perspective are now discussed. These attributes are described as: alignment of the strategic vision and school improvement plan and provision of pressure and support of learning.

Alignment of the strategic vision and school improvement plan

The teacher data did not identify specific details about the absence of a clearly articulated strategic vision or school improvement plan, whereas the consultants' interview did highlight this as an issue. As discussed in a previous section, Consultant #1 noted the need for the senior leadership team to clarify their strategic direction so that professional learning was a clearly articulated part of that direction. A few teachers shared some frustration with a lack of clear direction about the professional learning agenda. Harris (2009. p.258) writes of the importance of embedding autonomous distributed leadership practices within structures that are flexible, but draw from deeply co-ordinated practices. The findings indicated the need for more deeply co-ordinated practices and for these to be in alignment with the school's direction, strategic vision and school improvement plan.

Personal attributes such as principal passion and commitment to build capacity in others are not sufficient unless there is a clear link to a school improvement process; it may in effect be detrimental if not linked to a clear school strategic plan or shared with colleagues in a productive, critical and reflective way. As identified by the consultants, the alignment of school strategic direction and the methodology of professional learning are fundamental to successful improvement and a successful

school principal, is able to both align the structures and culture of the school and communicate that alignment with clarity. Johansson (as cited in Hoog, Johansson & Olofsson, 2005. p. 599) reinforces this when he writes of the misalignment between structure and strategy. He writes: "there are too many examples of principals who have made changes in the working structure, for instance teamwork, but because they have not addressed the cultural aspects, the expected successes have not occurred."

Provision of both pressure and support of learning

It is argued that the force for change or improvement is drawn most effectively from a balance of pressure and support (Day, 1999). This was also an observation the interviewer, shared in discussion with me following the completion of interviews. Having conducted the interviews and focus group session it was the interviewer's belief that there was a need for both pressure and support to be in evidence in relation to professional learning. "This is the business about pressure and support. [You need to create pressure] through your expectations [about engagement in professional learning] whilst also supporting the process through your infrastructure." (Principal's Journal, 2011. p.12) Similarly, Lambert (1998) in identifying a model for building leadership capacity in schools specifies the importance of providing space and time for people to struggle with tough issues.

Dufour and Marzano (2009. p. 64-65) also identify the importance of providing "support, resources and tools" to enable effective teacher collaboration around learning, and they advocate for principals to seek staff assistance to remove obstacles." Their viewpoint also supports the shifting model of support and pressure mooted by the research interviewer. Therefore, pressure might take the subtle form of expectation or it might be made explicit through structures of accountability. It is apparent that it is also important to avoid misalignment between support and pressure within the school. An overemphasis upon support without the pressure of expectation and accountability might be counterproductive to the anticipated outcomes.

Expectation around individual teacher learning needs to relate to the whole school agenda for learning, so pressure and support needs a context from which to operate and be applied. The principal needs to work with others in addressing the balance between the binaries. Fullan summarises this concept very adeptly in saying that

"extreme pressure without capacity results in dysfunctional behaviour" (2014. p. 270).

5.8 SUMMARY OF KEY PRINCIPAL INFLUENCES

In summary, it is apparent through the findings and the literature that a number of principal attributes and practices contributed to the effectiveness of leadership of effective teacher professional learning. Specifically, a successful principal brings together, in a coherent manner both the configuration and the culture of the school, or the personal and the organisational. Personal attributes ideally include an ability to model learning behaviour with passion as well as the ability to enable others through capacity-building. Organisational attributes of a successful school principal, one seeking to develop a robust teacher professional learning culture, will include the ability to explicitly align the strategic vision and school improvement plan as well as provide pressure and support needed to enable effective teacher learning. There is no guaranteed approach to effective principal leadership, nor is it formulaic (Cranston & Ehrich, 2008. p.9). Yet there are interconnected attributes and key practices that are evident in principal leaders who transform professional learning cultures and communities.

5.9 RELATIONSHIP OF FINDINGS TO THE STUDY'S THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework was developed from ideas raised by Crowther et al. in the area of school improvement, particularly in relationship to teacher and principal leadership of learning inside a school. It also drew from work by Logan and Dempster (1992) in relation to their 'four orientations to in-service education' model. Specifically, the theoretical framework drew strength from the common idea that teacher professional learning has its greatest impact upon school improvement when teachers are subjects within, rather than objects of learning and therefore are able to enact personal or collective agency in leadership of learning (O'Brien, 2006. p.77). The important themes that emerged from the research included: the constraining and enabling effects of time; perceived benefits of collaboration; the value of professional learning from within the school; and the principal's role in enabling effective professional learning practices.

Within these themes the common thread was the enabling effect of teacher agency. The importance of teacher agency as an enabler of effective teacher professional learning is represented diagrammatically in Figure 5.1. Further, it contends that school improvement, is more likely to occur when principal and teachers work collaboratively towards this goal.

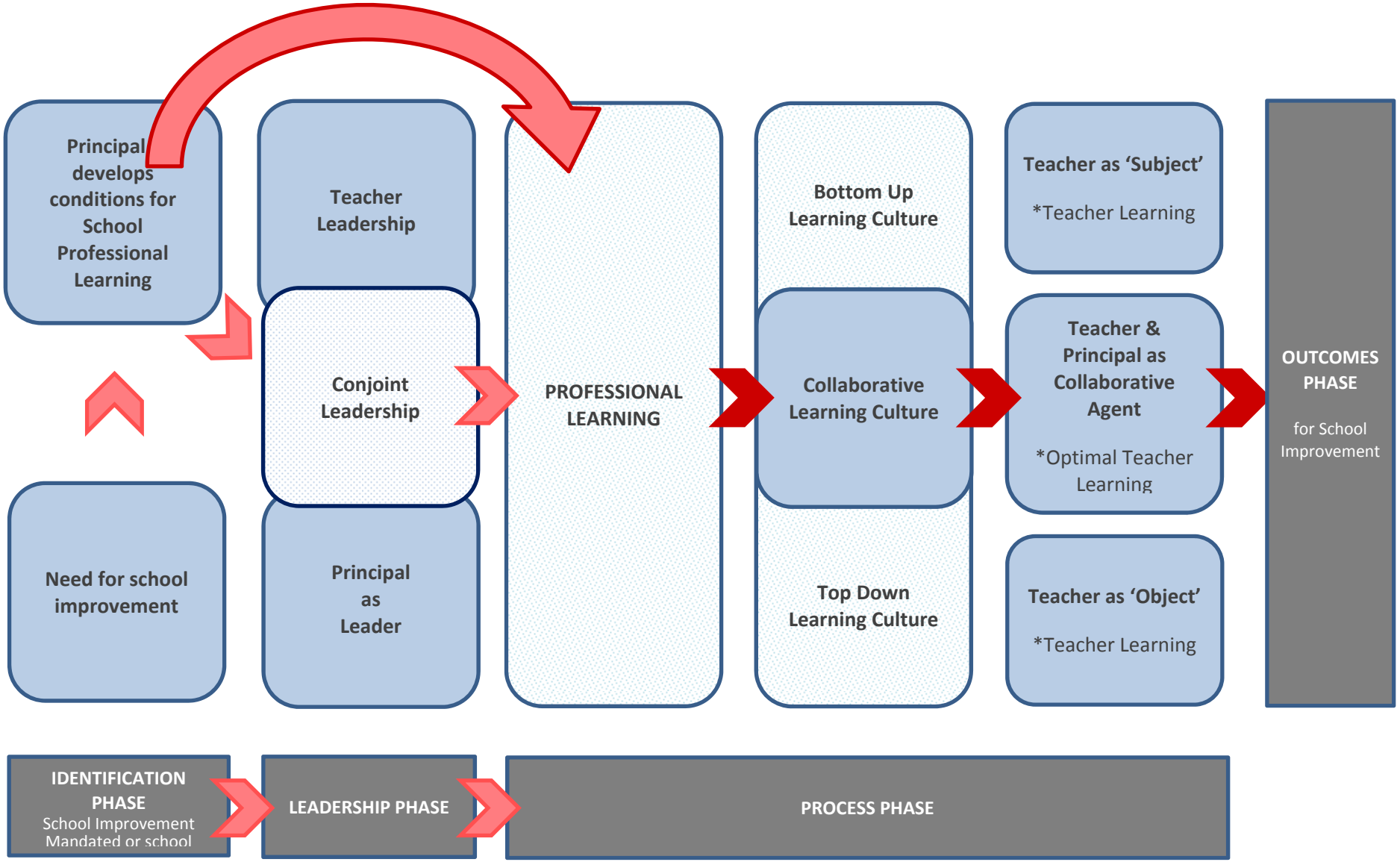

Figure 5.1. Teachers as agents of school improvement: A model of effective teacher professional learning.

5.10 RECONCEPTUALISED MODEL OF TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

As discussed earlier, the original model (Figure 2.5 and Figure 5.1), 'Teachers as Agents of School Improvement' provided an initial structure for considering the inter-relationship between the leadership of principals and teachers in relation to professional learning. It also considered a school's professional learning structure and teacher agency within that learning structure. However, it did not provide an accurate depiction of the study's findings.

It became apparent that the original model provided an insufficient representation of the complexities of an effective model of teacher professional learning. Specifically, it did not identify the paradoxical relationship between pressure from stakeholders, mandated requirements and support through time, resources and appropriate infrastructure. Furthermore, it did not highlight the fundamental importance of a school's strategic direction being in alignment with teachers' professional learning, nor did it explain in sufficient detail, the influence of the principal as lead learner and builder of infrastructure. The fundamental components of conjoint or shared leadership, a collaborative learning culture and teacher as collaborative agent were included in both diagrams. Evidently, prior to research, the value of collaboration and teacher agency were identified as vehicles for teacher professional learning and these components of the original model was confirmed in the findings.

The reconceptualised model retains alignment with the original theoretical underpinnings of Crowther's 'Parallel Leadership Model' (Crowther, Hann & McMaster, 2001. p. 141 see Figure 2.4) and the 'Four Orientations to in-service education' as developed by Logan and Dempster (1992. p.196 see Figure 2.3) insofar as it draws from their shared view of the way in which learning occurs when people are subjects rather than objects and therefore have agency; Crowther's focus on teachers as the key to school improvement from within a school; the pivotal relationship between principal and teacher in relation to pedagogical development and school wide learning; and his emphasis on alignment between school vision, strategic direction and the approach to teacher professional learning.

Despite these commonalities, greater focus has been directed to collective agency as a driving element for change and improvement. Crowther sees this in parallel form; it is represented and viewed conceptually within this model as a collective, shared space. Further to this, the research findings highlighted the shortcomings of the initial model and the importance of the following being represented within the model:

- The notion of pressure and support as providing impetus and agency for teacher professional learning;
- Communication of strategic direction and the school improvement plan;
- The inclusion of characteristics of effective professional learning practices (on-going, collaborative, research-focused, context relevant, reflective and driven by choice);
- The role of the principal throughout the full process of professional learning.

The literature and research findings confirm that professional learning is on-going, rather than episodic in nature. As such, the diagram has been reconceptualised: - it is represented initially as a whole, before being discussed in its components. Each of the key components are elaborated upon and draw from both the literature, and the research findings. As is discussed, the reconceptualised model is structured with circularity to represent the on-going, fluidity of effective professional learning as highlighted by Newmann, Youngs, Grove and King (2000). The reconceptualised model follows before each component is discussed more specifically.

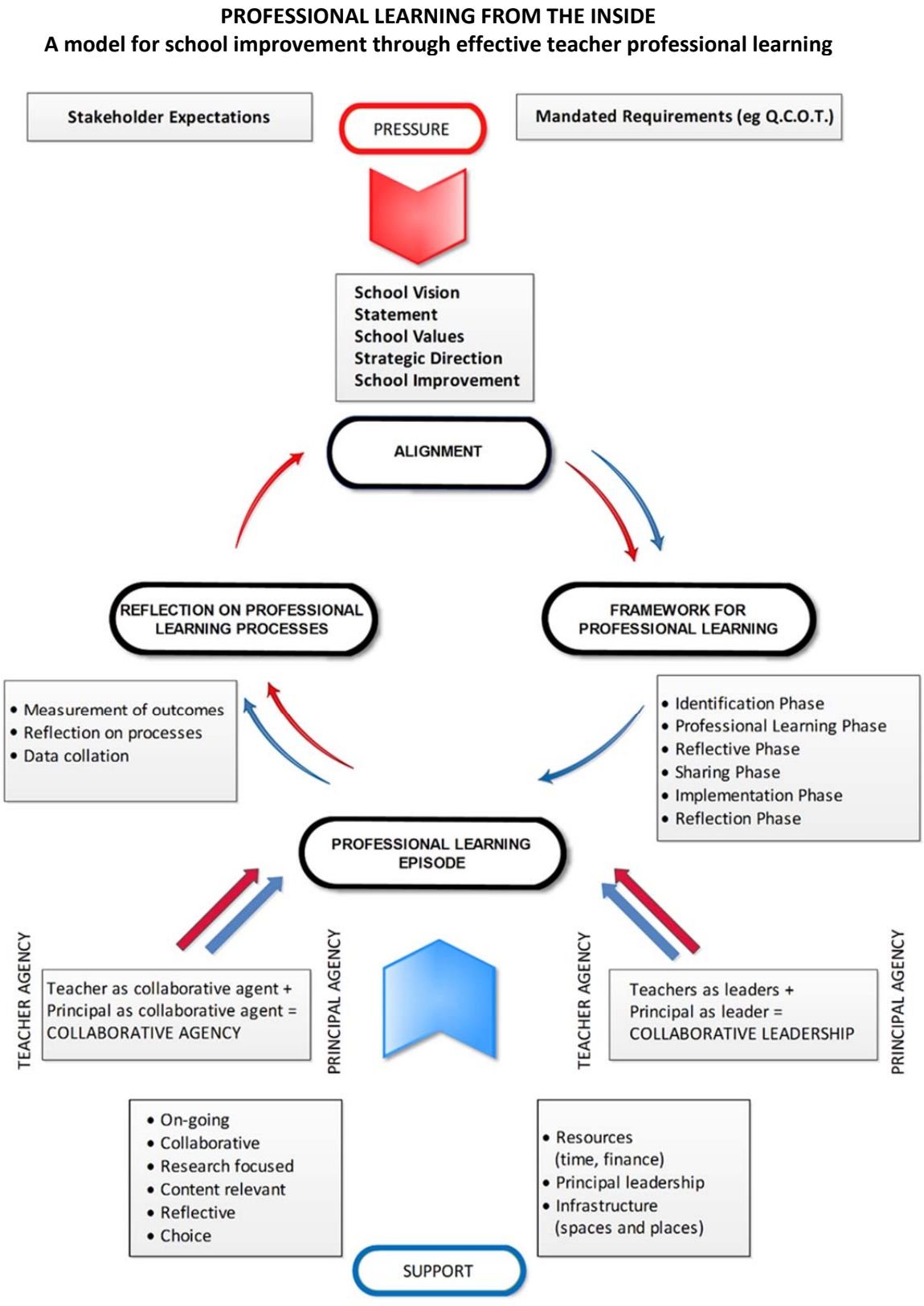

Figure 5.2. Teachers as agents of school improvement.

5.10.1 Overarching principles

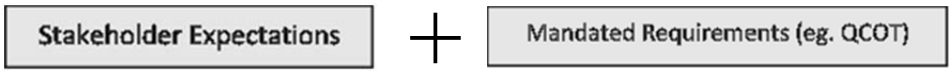

Figure 5.3. Overarching principles.

The quest for school improvement is driven both internally within schools and externally through government regulation and legislation. Stakeholders include a diversity of institutions and individuals, not restricted to teachers, principals, parents, students, governing boards, regulatory agencies, churches, governments and universities. The model acknowledges from the outset the compelling force for school improvement, a principle which the literature supports as best achieved through teacher professional learning (see for example: Adey, 2004; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Harris, 2010; Luke & McArdle, 2009).

The introduction of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) hours for teachers in Australian schools has been a government-driven mandate which has arisen from recognition of the links between effective professional learning, improved classroom practice and enhanced student outcomes. Why governments seek school improvement is not a topic of study or speculation within this thesis. It is acknowledged however, through the work of Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) that fulfilling a compliance-driven agenda is in tension with the importance of a collaborative, inquiry-based focus for teacher professional learning. It is this latter area upon which this thesis has its interest. How can professional learning practices place teachers as the agents of school improvement?

5.10.2 Pressure and support

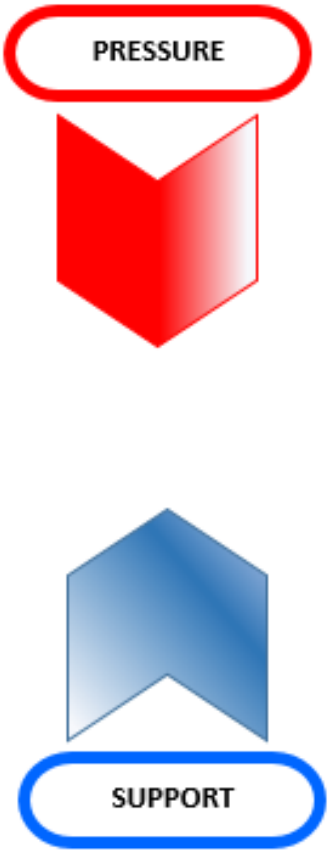

Figure 5.4. Pressure and support.

It has been acknowledged that government mandates and the agenda of compliance create pressure for school improvement. The NAPLAN testing and MySchool initiatives of the previous Labor government are indicative of student performance pressure which schools must address. Paradoxically the research and literature find that teachers learn best for change within classroom practice when they are able to exert agency and choice within their learning. Thus the arrows of support and pressure reflect this tension. They also reflect the internal pressure and support that exist within schools that allow teacher professional learning to occur, as was identified by the research interviewer. Pressure exists through expectation, accountability, intrinsic motivation to achieve better learning outcomes for students as well as many teachers own intrinsic interest in learning. Without pressure for change or improvement, learning is unlikely to occur.

Similarly, support is required to ensure effective professional learning can take place. The

single most significant finding from the current study in relation to support, was the importance of the resource of time. To support learning, schools need to give weighty consideration to the use of time, availability of time as well as the ways in which teachers view their own use of time. Other support measures include finance, principal attitude, and infrastructure organisation, capacity building in teachers and the distribution of leadership of learning.

Furthermore, it is argued that learning will be better supported when it is on-going, collaborative, research-focused, content relevant, reflective, and underpinned by choice.

- Resources
- (time, finance)
- Principal leadership
- Infrastructure
- (spaces and places)

- On-going
- Collaborative
- Research focused
- Content relevant
- Reflective
- Choice

5.10.3 Alignment

School Vision
Statement
School Values
Strategic Direction
School Improvement

One of the significant weaknesses of current teacher professional learning practices at RC as identified by the consultants at interview, was the lack of clear alignment between the school's strategic direction, its school improvement focus and the way in which teacher professional learning was structured. Thus, in the reconceptualised model, alignment has been placed at the top of the teacher professional learning activity cycle to represent its importance as a beginning point for teacher learning for school improvement. The research work behind Logan and Dempster's: 'Four orientations to in-service education' and Crowther, Hann and McMaster's (2001) 'Parallel Leadership' model that form the base of the theoretical framework and informed the original model (Figure 5.1) and also the reconceptualised model (Figure

5.2), reflect a view that school improvement is likely to occur when professional learning activities are structured, purposeful, and aligned with school goals and where high levels of teacher agency occur within that process. Frost (2000. p 20) states that school improvement and professional learning are not in conflict with one another but are mutually interdependent.

5.10.4 Teacher professional learning activity cycle

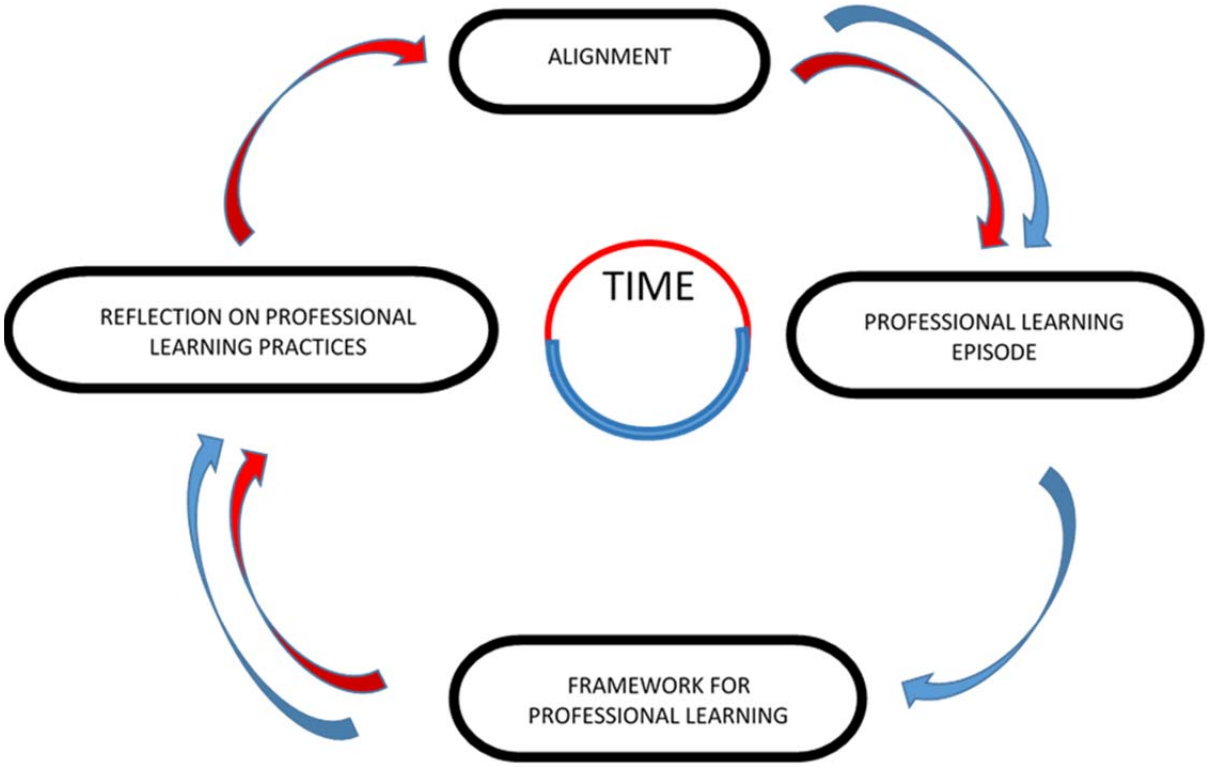

Figure 5.5. Teacher professional learning activity cycle.

Four central components are included within the learning activity cycle: - alignment (which has been discussed in the section above) professional learning episode, the framework for professional learning, and reflection on professional learning practices. The circular structure of this diagram is significant. It captures the idea of a point in time in learning within a school, thus the arrows represent pressure or support or both. Learning might occur at any point within the cycle, but the stages are significantly entwined, and ideally embedded within a high learning, high performing school.

At the centre of this diagram is ‘time’ since its utilisation is key to the effectiveness of learning as well as the agency of those engaged in learning. The two semicircles

that form the circle are blue and red, representative of pressure and support that is elicited through time. Whilst diagrammatically pressure and support are presented equally, this will vary dramatically given the context, the teacher, the learning moment.

Another important finding from the research was about provision of adequate time for reflection on learning. Reflection is thus a prominent feature of the cycle; it is also a key feature of the proposed framework for professional learning. Its inclusion twice shows its importance as an ongoing embedded part of the learning cycle. The choice of terminology ‘reflective’ and ‘reflection’ is deliberate, with the view that being reflective is a more transitory state than the ‘nominalised’ reflection phase.

The proposed framework as indicated to the right of the cycle (Figure 5.6) proposes six stages of teacher professional learning to replicate the amalgam of phases identified by the surveyed and interviewed teachers as important to their learning. Further to this, it is anticipated that within the final reflection phase (point six), outcomes may be measured and data collected. This then feeds back into a new cycle, where learning needs are identified and professional learning is required to create new knowledge or to problem solve, such is the on-going nature of effective teacher professional learning.

Professional Learning Framework

- Identification Phase
- Professional Learning Phase
- Reflective Phase
- Sharing Phase
- Implementation Phase
- Reflection Phase

Figure 5.6. Phases of professional learning.

Theses phases of professional learning (Figure 5.6) are represented diagrammatically below as a separate flow chart, (Figure 5.7), Framework for Professional Learning since these six phases of learning may be looked at, conceptually as a cycle. The circular representation indicates the on-going nature of the professional learning, with each phase integral to the next.

Figure 5.7. Framework for Professional Learning. Adapted from Eacham High School Pedagogical Framework (cited in 'From School Improvement to Sustained Capacity' Crowther, 2011, p. 117)

5.10.5 Collaborative agency and collaborative leadership

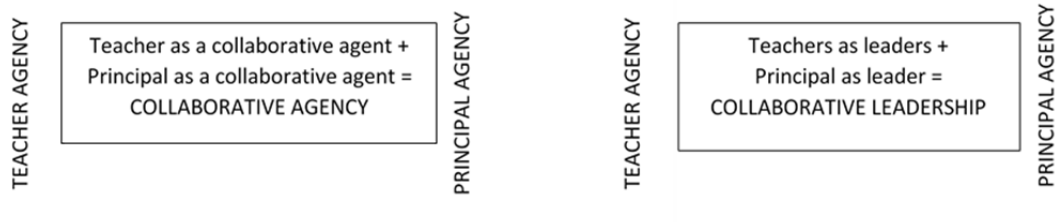

Figure 5.8. Collaborative agency and collaborative leadership.

In this model, collaborative agency is a driver for the teacher professional learning cycle, fuelled by both pressure and support. When it works in conjunction with collaborative leadership, teacher agency and principal agency are potentially at their highest level of force. It is this conjoint space that is of greatest interest to the development of effective teacher professional learning. Day (1999. pp. 97 – 98) writes that the improvement or the change process are unlikely to occur unless there is teacher agency evident. Effective teacher professional learning is potentially at its strongest when underpinned by teacher agency within the process (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Gonzales & Vodicka, 2008; Invargson & Anderson, 2007; Sachs, 2003) and fostered through a collaborative rather than a hierarchical leadership structure.

5.10.6 Summary of reconceptualised model

This reconceptualised model of effective teacher professional learning seeks to represent an ideal approach to teacher professional learning within a school context. It draws on both the findings from the current study as well as literature in the areas of teacher agency, professional learning and leadership. The circularity of the central figure within the model embodies the fluid nature of professional learning, that is on-going in nature and able to respond, or, at times, simultaneously from reflection to implementation to sharing. In considering the continuous nature of learning in effective learning organisations, Fullan (2014) states: “the primary tool for improvement in any organisation are cultures that build in learning everyday” (p. 30). Similarly, Senge (1990) talks of learning organisations as “learning to see the whole together” (p.3). In essence, the full model is a representation of effective teacher professional learning.

5.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study in relation to the effects of principal leadership upon a single school's professional learning culture and the role of teacher agency as a catalyst for deeper, sustainable teacher professional learning and the improvement of educational outcomes in relation to professional learning have been the focus of this chapter. The five themes that emerged from the findings of the study related to time, agency, collaboration, learning from inside the school and the principal's role in supporting effective professional learning and these have been discussed in relation to the two research questions upon which the study is based. Further to this, the theoretical framework upon which the study was founded, drawing on work of Crowther (1994 to 2011) and also Logan and Dempster (1992), has also been considered in view of the study's findings and analysis. A reconceptualised model for effective teacher professional learning was presented and has been discussed.

It is apparent that there are some strong commonalities between the findings and the principles of the reconceptualised model. These commonalities refer to the importance of:

- collaborative approaches to learning;
- contextually based learning;
- teacher choice, agency and determination of learning; and
- the importance of the principal as the enabler and architect of structures that support effective teacher professional learning.

Moreover, it is considered that the enablers of teacher agency within teacher professional learning in a whole school context are enacted in schools when there is:

- the resource of time is utilised to best advantage and effect;
- the opportunity for teachers to work together collaboratively and with choice in developing new knowledge and understandings about their work;
- teacher professional learning occurs effectively within the school context and teachers can see the direct relationship between their learning and that of their students;
- the principal provides infrastructure support and demonstrates a personal interest professional learning.

Conversely, constraints to teacher agency are apparent in schools where:

- the resource of time is not distributed appropriately for individual teacher's needs;
- there is non-alignment between professional learning and the school strategic direction;
- poor infrastructure support for the 'full' process of teacher professional learning; and
- limited leadership capacity-building.

The second research question sought to understand the principal's role in influencing the development of professional learning for teachers in a school. The findings of the current study and supported by the literature (see Du Four, Eaker & Du Four, 2006; Crowther, 2002; Fullan 2002; Lambert 2004) indicated that principals require certain personal and organisational attributes to support effective development of effective professional learning for teachers. Regarding the personal attributes, successful principals enable and build capacity in others and model effective learning behaviours, with passion. In regard to the organisational, principals ensure alignment of the strategic vision of the school in relation to the school improvement plan and provide both pressure and support for effective teacher professional learning.

Based on the findings from this research a reconceptualised model for professional learning was proposed. A key contribution of this new model was its new way of conceptualising teacher agency within teacher professional learning as a catalyst for school improvement. Through the research process, in consideration of previous studies conducted, a greater understanding of the constraints and enablers of teacher agency within teacher professional learning and the ways in which principals influence the development of professional learning for teachers within a school context has been gained.

The concluding chapter draws together a summary of previous chapters, the key findings of the research, the significance of those findings, reflections on the research process and recommendations for further research or for teacher professional learning practices within schools.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a summary of the research and findings outlined in this study that focused on the role of teacher agency as a catalyst for deep and sustainable teacher professional learning and school improvement. Further, it considered the principal's role as a facilitator in the development of professional learning for teachers. Specifically, the study sought to understand the enablers and constraints involved in heightening teacher agency within teacher professional learning, as well as the significance of my influence, as principal, in developing quality professional learning for teachers.

The literature review, theoretical framework, methodology and findings are reviewed then there is a re-examination of the aim of the study, the research problem and the associated research questions. Following this review, the implications for teacher practice, policy and theory are indicated then the study limitations are highlighted. Finally, the chapter considers the implications of the study's findings for principals and researchers and suggests possible areas of future research in relation to sustainable teacher professional learning and school improvement.

6.2 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to investigate teacher professional learning at the school at which I am principal. The study sought to develop an understanding of teacher professional learning, since the research literature in this area indicates a strong correlation between quality teacher learning, quality student learning and school improvement. Results from this study highlighted the value of teachers working collaboratively, in context, to learn from, and with each other. The findings also show that principals strongly influence the way in which teacher professional learning occurs through their own attitude and approach to learning, as well as by the effectiveness of the organisational infrastructure that they build that supports teacher learning.

6.3 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem first presented itself when I moved from the position of Deputy Principal to Principal at the beginning of 2009. I wanted to understand the scope and influence of a principal in relation to teacher professional learning that facilitates school improvement. The mandatory introduction of CPD (Continuing Professional Development) through the Queensland College of Teachers coincided with my appointment and drew further attention to this important aspect of school learning and provided additional pressure for a closer look at existing practices around teacher professional learning at RC.

A further catalyst for exploring the area of teacher professional learning was an informal school-based survey of teachers I conducted in 2007 that sought feedback from teachers about the effectiveness of the professional learning component of the student free days at the commencement of that school year. Data collected indicated the importance of choice, relevance, and in-school contextualised learning for teachers at RC. Furthermore, an increasing body of research around school improvement that I was exploring in my role as a Principal and through my Education Doctorate studies, pointed to the importance of effective professional learning for teachers as a means of achieving improvement. These factors combined, led to consideration of the following research questions for this professional doctorate:

6.3.1 Research questions

1) What processes enable or constrain teacher agency within teacher professional learning in a whole school context?

2) How, and in what ways, do school principals influence the development of professional learning for teachers in a school?

6.4 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study drew upon local, national and international research in addressing five main areas that pertain to teacher professional learning. Each area became a section of this literature review. The first section defined the current policy and research context in which professional learning is situated,

particularly in its relationship to school improvement. The second section explained the key terminology, including: educational leadership, teacher agency, and professional learning, since the interpretation of these terms was crucial to the ways in which the literature was understood. The third section discussed the enablers of effective teacher professional learning within a school context, that is, heightened teacher agency, collaborative approaches to teacher learning and the role of the principal in leading teacher professional learning within a school context. The final section discussed the theoretical framework that was used as the theoretical underpinning for this study.

6.4.1 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study drew primarily from the research work of Crowther (1994 to 2011) as well as key concepts that Logan and Dempster (1992) discuss in their work in relation to in-service education, a word akin to professional learning. The concept of teacher agency, of central importance to this study, was represented in Crowther's work as teachers as 'leaders of learning' and in Logan & Dempster's as 'people as subjects', rather than objects upon whom learning is dictated from above.

Of further interest to the theoretical framework underpinning this study was Crowther, Ferguson and Hann's (2009) emphasis on principals and teachers working collectively to build school capacity a relationship they described as parallel leadership. Whilst the term seems contrary to collective, shared leadership, the description of parallel leadership as having shared purpose, aligned with this study's research interest.

Arising from the theoretical framework was an initial model conceptualising effective teacher professional learning set within a school context (see Figure 5.1). This model was later reconceptualised (see Figure 5.2) following the research findings that arose from this study and is discussed later in this concluding chapter.

6.5 CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

A single case study methodology was adopted to examine teacher agency within professional learning at RC, as well as the principal's role in influencing this agency and learning. The choice to posit my research within an interpretivist qualitative paradigm was related to an interest with meaning-making within the particular context, and allowed me to draw on participants' perceptions and emic views. As both researcher and as principal of the school where the research was conducted, I wanted to understand more fully, the teachers' lived experience of professional learning at RC. Further, this interpetivist approach drew from a socially-constructed worldview which is in alignment with the theoretical underpinnings of the study. It also reflects the socio-constructivist work of researchers such as Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) and Sergiovanni (1992) whose theoretical work also influenced this study. The use of a critical friend and the inclusion of the interviews with the two educational consultants, who had been involved in a professional learning project with teachers at RC throughout 2011, provided further perspectives and enriched and broadened the data.

Data were drawn from four primary sources: interviews with seven volunteer teachers both individually and in a focus group session, interviews with two educational consultants who worked at RC during 2011, surveys of 48 volunteer teachers and my own reflective journal.

6.6 CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The findings from the research into teacher professional learning identified five key themes: time, agency, collaboration, professional learning from inside the school and the role of the principal as an enabler of effective teacher professional learning.

Table 6.1 *Emergent Themes and Sub Themes*

THEME	DATA SOURCE/S	SUB THEMES
A. Time	Surveys Interviews	▪ Time as an enabler. ▪ Time as a constraint. ▪ Time for implementation. ▪ Time for sharing.
B. Agency	Surveys Interviews Principal's Journal	▪ Agency as freedom to choose and direct one's learning. ▪ Agency as learning empowerment for the collective good.
C. Collaboration	Surveys Interviews Principal's Journal	▪ Collaboration as a platform for school improvement. ▪ Collaboration as shared accountability. ▪ Collaboration as enjoyment.
D. Professional Learning inside the school	Surveys Interviews	▪ Learning from colleagues ▪ Enhanced by infrastructure
E. Principal's role in enabling effective professional learning practices	Surveys Interviews Principal's Journal	▪ Principal as builder of infrastructure ▪ Principal's attitude to professional learning

6.6.1 **Time** (see Table 6.1)

A significant element of this study was the effect of time in relation to the effectiveness of teacher professional learning. The sub-themes of time as an enabler and a constraint were identified. Further sub-themes stressed the importance of allowing time for implementation and sharing of teacher learning. The significance of reconceptualising and structuring the way in which time is allocated to professional learning activities underscored the findings. The study found that effective teacher professional learning involves far greater time commitment than the ubiquitous and often expensive one-off workshop or conference experiences. Further, it found that, with appropriate infrastructure, time can be utilised to great effect with in-school professional learning activities.

6.6.2 **Agency** (see Table 6.1)

Underpinning this study was an interest in teacher agency and its relationship to teacher professional learning. Two sub-themes were identified: agency as freedom to

choose and direct one's learning and agency as learning empowerment for the collective good.

Whilst some specific interview and survey questions sought feedback regarding teachers' experience of agency, it was apparent that teachers' understandings of the term were restricted to a notion of agency as freedom to choose one's learning or as a tool of empowerment for all teachers. The findings also confirmed that teacher agency is both constrained and enabled within the school context studied. In the distribution of resources such as time and finance, principal leadership practices and by the infrastructure support of professional learning enabling and constraining occurs. If teacher agency is to be enabled, then principal support is required to support the way in which time is allocated, privileged and conceived. Learning as on-going in nature, rather than spasmodic or 'one-off' episodes also changes the way time is conceived.

6.6.3 Collaboration (see Table 6.1)

Interlinked with the themes of time and agency was the third theme of collaboration. Within this theme three sub-themes were identified: collaboration as a platform for school improvement; as shared accountability and as enjoyment. Many respondents identified the importance of collaboration for their own learning but spoke of the importance of providing time for it to occur. Respondents acknowledged that collaboration produced a heightened sense of agency which they described as empowerment and enjoyment through being able to exercise choice in their learning. The consultants added a further dimension to collaboration by emphasising teacher collaboration as valuable for individual teachers but identified its broader importance as an essential platform for school improvement.

6.6.4 Professional learning from inside the school (see Table 6.1)

Two sub-themes were identified within this theme: learning from colleagues and that professional learning from within a school is enhanced by infrastructure. From the data gathered, it was apparent that teachers perceived value in learning from colleagues, learning with colleagues and generating new knowledge from within their school context, as opposed to going outside the school to learn. However, it was

emphasised that appropriate infrastructure support that considers the allocation of time, the collaboration of teachers, and opportunities to exercise agency is required to enable professional learning from within the school to occur effectively.

6.6.5 Principal's role in enabling effective teacher professional learning practices (see Table 6.1)

The fifth theme identified the principal's role in enabling effective teacher professional learning. Within this theme two further sub-themes were identified: principal as builder of infrastructure as well as the principal's attitude to professional learning. Teachers placed emphasis upon the personal qualities of the principal as a lead learner, one who was passionate about professional learning. In contrast, the educational consultants explicitly noted the organisational role of the principal as the architect of infrastructure that supports teacher learning. Furthermore, the consultants highlighted the importance of the principal ensuring alignment between the school's strategic direction and school improvement plan as a shared understanding with teachers.

6.6.6 The enablers of teacher professional learning

According to a plethora of educational researchers (Adey, 2004; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Harris, 2010; Luke & McArdle, 2009; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Sarason, 1990) school improvement follows positive change at a classroom level. Whilst a diversity of forms of professional learning are relevant within a school, it is argued that professional learning within a school that is collaborative, contextualised, aligned with the school's strategic direction and develops teacher agency will have greatest sustained impact. What has been emphasised through this study, is the importance of teachers engaging in the process of professional learning through their own decision-making (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009. p.63) and thus acting with agency.

The findings of this study clarified the importance of treating agency not as a singular, unrelated concept, but rather as one that is intrinsically linked to the professional learning culture of the school. It is, as Giddens (1984) suggests, inextricably bound to the social structures, that is the school structures, in which it

exists. There was an expectation, prior to the study, that simply by heightening teacher agency for teachers' own learning, that other components such as collaboration, self-reflection and leadership, would almost inevitably be strengthened too. The study indicated that a multiplicity of factors contribute to an effective whole school professional learning culture and cannot be developed in isolation.
Teacher agency is affected by a diversity of inter-related influences that can be both constraining and enabling; its impact will also affect different teachers differently. For example, one teacher can experience high levels of agency through their inherent desire to improve and learn. Thus the release of time to undertake professional learning can add to that teacher's agency. On the other hand, another teacher may feel constrained by the imposition of a mandated professional learning activity, deemed irrelevant to their classroom work. The factors identified in this study having the most salient influence upon the constraining or enabling levels of teacher agency include resources in the form of time and finance, principal leadership, and an appropriate infrastructure that allows for agency to be sustained, rather than episodic.

6.6.7 The constraints to teacher professional learning

Conversely, the findings also indicated that a number of factors can constrain teacher agency within teacher professional learning. Specifically, constraints are apparent when there is:

- non-alignment between professional learning and the school strategic direction;
- insufficient time for learning, for implementation, for sharing, for reflection;
- poor infrastructure support for 'full' teacher professional learning; and
- insufficient leadership capacity-building.

6.6.8 Principal's role in influencing the development of professional learning for teachers

The findings and the literature as discussed in Chapter Two confirmed that principals exert significant influence upon the way in which teacher professional learning develops in a school context. Whilst teacher professional learning is affected by a multiplicity of connected principal influences these can be divided into personal and organisational attributes. Personal attributes can be broadly categorised as modelling

learning behaviour with passion, and the enabling of others. Organisational attributes are evidenced by provision of appropriate infrastructure, alignment of the strategic vision and the school improvement plan and the provision of both pressure and support of learning.

The expectation prior to undertaking the study was that the principal's example, engagement, and modelling would be identified as important. This was confirmed. Teachers indicated that effective principals lead by example, support others' learning, have currency of knowledge and also a passion for learning. Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford, (2005; p. 539) in describing principals that make a positive difference to professional learning cultures, write of passionate leaders. Similarly, the consultants spoke positively of my own enthusiastic example as a leader of learning.

The consultants also saw the principal's role in building capacity in other leaders within the school as fundamental to enabling the growth of an effective and sustainable professional learning culture. Distribution of leadership, discussed more fully in Chapter Two, is the responsibility of the principal who is required to share leadership through building of leadership capacity in others. This capacity-building will occur more effectively with careful planning and co-ordination to ensure sustainability. As discussed in relation to Research Question One, a constraint to teacher agency can be caused through the way in which leadership is distributed, or the way in which capacity is built in others via the principal.

Principals' personal attributes are important sources of influence, yet it is not sufficient for teachers to feel valued, inspired by passion and enabled, they must also have sufficient agency to act, and to do so as leaders, rather than those being led. It was indicated through both the literature and findings that principals' passion towards professional learning and their enabling of teachers to learn contributes to the development of a positive learning culture. However, principals also need to possess strong organisational attributes.

These attributes are evidenced in the provision of appropriate infrastructure support including allocation of resources for learning, especially the provision of time: - time for a learning episode; time for reflection after that episode and; time for planning, implementation and sharing were all considered important. The study identified that

a suitable infrastructure enables heightened levels of teacher agency required for sustaining a positive professional learning culture. In contrast, Dietz and Burns' (1992) research in relation to teacher agency identified constraints to agency as physical structures that make action impossible and a particular repertoire and structure of rules that negate individual self-direction and self-regulation. The consultants stressed the fundamental importance of professional learning having purpose, and being tied to a school's strategic and organisational aims. When these aspects are interlinked and there is a balance of pressure and support (Day, 1999) to enact these organisational aims, then there are strong conditions for professional learning to occur.

6.6.9 Summary of findings

In summary, the study identified the importance of time, teacher agency, collaborative learning structures, professional learning inside the school and the principal as key enablers of teacher professional learning. Constraints to effective teacher professional learning were also identified as occurring when there is non-alignment between professional learning and the school strategic direction; poor infrastructure support for 'full' teacher professional learning; and insufficient leadership capacity-building.

For effective teacher professional learning to occur the principal requires specific personal attributes, as well as the ability to provide appropriate infrastructure support to enable that learning to occur. The findings identified that there is scope for strengthening infrastructure support at RC. At the point of data collection there was evidence of unco-ordinated structural influences, particularly in relation to tenuous articulation of the links between strategic goals for the school and school improvement aims.

6.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AT RC

This study revealed the broad learning benefits of teachers undertaking research into their teaching through professional learning set within their own school context and focused upon bringing about school improvement. The findings indicated that when learning is directly and situatively relevant to the classroom or school context, and

research of practice is of clear pertinence, then the possibilities for teachers to exert agency in their own learning and the improvement of the school, are likely to heighten. The challenge for RC and other schools is to shift understandings about professional learning so that it is conceptualised as more than attending a conference or workshop.

If learning from within a school is undertaken effectively then the budget for teacher professional learning also needs to be looked at differently. Economic savings from developing learning practices within the setting, rather than relying upon agents outside of the school, is possible. Nonetheless, a crucial finding from the study is about the way in which teacher time is structured within a school. It is apparent that to support effective teacher professional learning, then teacher time needs to be organised differently. Somehow, more non-contact time needs to be made available, as well as time for collaboration amongst teachers. There are significant budgetary implications related to releasing teachers from classroom contact time, as well as implications inherent from time away from the classroom. Time for teacher professional learning needs to be viewed in a more comprehensive way, incorporating time for reflection, implementation, sharing and further reflection as crucial components of an authentic professional learning framework based in teacher agency within a school.

From an RC perspective our thinking about teacher professional learning has been shifted throughout the course of this study. A number of collaborative research projects have been undertaken within the school and time allowance has been allocated to those involved. We also now seek opportunities to resource whole school learning projects so that learning is beneficial to all and in alignment with the school's strategic direction. Nonetheless, there are challenges at RC in reconceptualising time. Teachers can commit to two days out of the classroom for a conference but have yet to see the value in spending another day or two in reflecting, planning for implementation and sharing that learning. Ultimately, there is still comfort in the traditional spray tan approach to professional learning that will take time to rethink in practice. Opfer and Pedder (2011) discuss the shift in thinking required within schools to move from outsourced professional learning to internal development and capacity building. They argue for "schools [to] spend as much (or

some may argue more) time on internal development, execution, and capacity building as they do on searching and discovering new ideas" (p. 392).

What this study reinforces is that the principal's role in influencing effective teacher professional learning is much larger than simply providing resources of time and finance.

6.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

As discussed in the introduction to this study, during the last decade the mandating of professional development hours across Australia and internationally has placed focus on the way in which professional development is enacted and measured and has added to external pressure for the improvement of the quality of teaching and teacher. Locally, the reduction of the mandatory hours of continuing professional development (CPD) in Queensland from 30 hours to 20, is of concern for policy-makers. It suggests that 20 hours of teacher professional learning is sufficient regulated annual learning for teachers. Schools, therefore, that seek improvement in learning for all, have a responsibility to develop a robust professional learning culture that ensures learning for teachers extends far beyond a mere five hours per school term. The Scottish model of collaborative professional learning supports the findings of this study and whilst its implementation is not mandatory in Scotland, its structure is worth consideration by policy-makers.

Ironically, despite a reduction in mandatory hours of continuing professional learning for Queensland teachers, pressure to learn professionally has emerged through the development of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. These standards have further defined teacher professionalism and informed the development of professional learning goals for teachers (AITSL, 2011. p.3). Irrespective of whether these policies have had a regulatory or enhancing effect (Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald & Bell, 2005) they have created opportunities for greater focus on the effectiveness of professional learning upon student learning. There is scope for such policy-writers to broaden their definition of professional learning and to place greater emphasis and value upon internal learning development and capacity building within schools.

6.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

A major contribution of this study to the field of professional learning has been the development of a model of 'Effective Teacher Professional Learning'. This model has implications for theory. While not providing a perfect blueprint for other schools to follow, the experiences at RC may be relevant to other schools contending with similar issues in their own context.

The model demands a new way of thinking about professional learning. It acknowledges the overarching principles of stakeholder expectations and mandated requirements. The significant interplay between principals providing pressure and support for learning is embedded in the model. Alignment between school vision, values, strategic direction and school improvement is pivotal and demands that professional learning decisions incorporate much bigger thinking. The proposed teacher professional learning activity cycle (see Figure 5.5) requires new and creative thinking about time allocation for professional learning. Time needs to be conceived differently as a resource (Bredeson, 2003) and seen alongside phases of learning including identifying, formal learning, reflecting, sharing, implementing and reflecting again through measurement of outcomes. These phases are represented diagrammatically in more specific detail in the Framework for Professional Learning (Figure 5.7). Finally, it challenges theories of leadership and places emphasis on collaborative agency and collaborative leadership and it demands that principals lead by passionate example and through architecture of an infrastructure that supports the complex interplay between factors that contribute to effective professional learning from within a school.

Finally, the reconceptualised model of effective teacher professional learning makes a contribution to an important field characterised by a paucity of research relating to the role of teacher agency within teacher professional learning. It gives emphasis to professional learning where knowledge production, rather than knowledge consumption (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009) is valued and it problematises traditional ways of 'doing' professional learning. As such, the model contributes to theoretical understandings of teacher professional learning and poses questions about the way in which it occurs in schools. Some of these questions are now considered along with some recommendations for principal colleagues seeking to approach

teacher professional learning, differently, or seeking to reflect upon the effectiveness of current practices.

6.10 RECOMMENDATIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS

These recommendations are presented as considerations for colleague principals. The recommendations are presented as questions for reflection.

6.10.1 Recommendation 1 Reconceptualise the notion of time for professional learning

A significant source of angst for teachers and principals within a school is ‘time’. Within the study, time was seen as both an enabler and a constraint for teacher agency within teachers’ learning. The relationship of time to teacher professional learning needs further reconceptualisation. As such, the following questions for principals to consider are relevant:

1. What are the structures for granting time for critical reflection following a significant professional learning episode? What are the expectations, checks and balances to ensure this occurs, and occurs effectively?
2. What structures and expectations support time for the sharing of learning between colleagues both formally and informally?
3. What time structures and expectations support the implementation of teacher professional learning into classroom practices?
4. What time structures are dedicated to reflection upon implementation and the collection of data to support that implementation?

6.10.2 Recommendation 2 Reconceptualise the way in which professional learning is viewed

A heartening finding from the research was that most teachers at RC now use the term professional learning over professional development because it captures a broader, more on-going picture of teacher learning. This shift is not simply semantic as Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) argue. It reflects on-going dialogue and reflection around the contentious area of professional learning over the past 5 years. As such the following questions may be of relevance.

1. Which is the preferred term for in-service education within your school – teacher professional learning or teacher professional development?
2. How is teacher professional learning understood and enacted within your school?
3. What aspects of teacher professional learning are seen to affect improved classroom practice?
4. What do your teachers believe best practice teacher professional learning to be? Why?

6.10.3 Recommendation 3 Make explicit connections between strategic direction, school improvement plan and professional learning

A recurring theme identified within the findings, was the tenuous link between the school‘s strategic direction, its school improvement plan, and teacher professional learning. Where teachers were interested in improvement, professional learning tended to be confined to their own practice and was not linked explicitly to a broader school improvement agenda. In examining the link between these aspects of your school operations, you may wish to consider the following questions.

1. Do you have a professional learning framework that is operationally and explicitly linked to your school improvement and strategic plans?
2. Do your teachers ‘own’ school improvement, or do they perceive it as an agenda directed at them?
3. What are teacher expectations of you as lead learner?

6.10.4 Recommendation 4 Support collaborative approaches to learning

The research discussed in Chapter 2, the review of literature, highlighted the significance of collaborative approaches to learning between teachers as of key importance when seeking school improvement. The findings of this research highlighted the momentum gained through teachers working with others, generating ideas and being accountable to others. Thus the following questions may be of relevance.

1. Is collaborative practice embedded within your teachers’ professional learning?
2. Is collaborative practice restricted to departments or sub schools or is it whole-school oriented?

6.10.5 Recommendation 5 Build leadership of learning capacity in others

Another key finding was the importance of principals building capacity in others, of distributing leadership, and developing more robust leadership structures. Distributed leadership is not a new concept in the field of educational leadership: - nonetheless it is valuable to reflect upon the structures within one's school that can enhance and strengthen this practice. Research strongly supports the need for capacity-building in others as a means of sustaining a culture of positive teacher professional learning. Consider the following questions as guides to changing your practices:

1. What structures exist within your school to enable others to seek, find and enjoy leadership of learning?
2. Is the concept of 'teachers as leaders' a semantic or real concept within your school?
3. Do/how do teachers conceive themselves as leaders?

6.11 REFLECTIONS ON THE DUAL ROLE OF RESEARCHER AND PRINCIPAL

As both principal of the school that was under study and as researcher I assumed the privileged and tenuous position of insider/outsider, or as Freilich (1970) comments, a "marginal native". Despite the ambiguities inherent in the dual roles of principal and researcher I have been privileged to gain a unique insight into professional learning at RC than I would have gained by retaining an insider's only perspective, albeit an insight gained from a position of power. I use the term 'tenuous' to capture the special considerations that need to be given to researching from a point of positional power within a school. Irrespective of my commitment to working 'with' and not 'on' my colleagues (McNiff, 1998), consideration had to be given to the effect of my role relationship with teachers who are both my colleagues and under my direction and supervision.

I have had a real sense of stepping into the research world described by Hammersley and Atkinson, (2007. p. 89) as both familiar and strange, stranger and friend. At times, I read transcripts and smiled in agreement, at other times the school has been judged differently from my expectations. Nevertheless, I have had the privilege of being able to examine the school and my role in it, through a new lens. In 1996

when Simmons wrote of the paradox of the case study, she described it as a study where, through observation of the uniqueness of the particular, an understanding of the universal occurs. Within the tension of the paradox is the opportunity for understanding a situation differently. This description captures the essence of my experience as principal and researcher. This is the strength of practitioner researcher within a professional doctorate. As the researcher I was the "primary agent of control" (Costley & Stephenson, 2009) with the opportunity to choose a slice of life to examine, within its natural context. I have also been able, potentially, to contribute to the professionalism of the field of educational leadership and teacher professional learning whilst developing insights into my own school site and my own responsibilities as principal.

One of the limitations of the research inherent in being both insider/outsider is the unknown effect of this duality. I am unable to gauge the level of restraint in responses to both survey and interview, and whether the picture captured in the data is representative of the true picture of the teacher professional learning landscape at RC. Furthermore, in reading and analysing the data, I have been conscious of having to move from the subjectivity of the position of principal, to the assumed objectivity of researcher. I wonder what invisible biases existed in the way in which I filtered the reading of this data and what limitations exist because of that.

6.12 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As outlined in the preceding recommendations section, a series of questions have been posed for school principals for their consideration. In relation to these questions, this study suggests further research in the areas of teacher professional learning:

- Implementation of the reconceptualised model for teacher professional learning could be undertaken within another school and its effectiveness researched.
- A comparison between the agency effects of teachers engaged in in-school learning and those engaged in outsourced professional learning activities could be undertaken.
- Effective teacher professional learning could be considered and researched through the exclusive voice of school principals.

- An investigation into student perceptions of the effects of the classroom work of researching professionals could be undertaken.
- A study could focus on the way in which time is utilised for teacher professional learning in a range of schools. What might the allocation of time for reflecting, sharing, planning, implementing and measuring learning be?

6.13 CHAPTER AND THESIS SUMMARY

The tension between the pressure and support required to enable an effective professional learning culture within a school is captured effectively in the words of Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) who write:

> … and it requires a willingness to navigate the unsettling, the uncomfortable and sometimes the downright messy in the negotiation of professional learning that meets the needs of teachers and their students and schools, on the part of schools and teachers themselves, as well as those of us who work alongside teachers in the interests of professional learning (p. 70).

In summary, this study contributes to the highly relevant national and international school improvement literature as well as contributing greater understanding about teacher professional learning and the role of the principal in supporting this learning. It considers the significance of the current educational context which is dichotomously characterised by the push and pull of teacher professional standards and increasing measurement and accountabilities around student outcomes. It places its findings in relation to teachers who have been commodified as key resources for 'ensuring global competitiveness' of a country's education outcomes (Furlong, 2013. p. 29) and who are often at the mercy of "governments seiz[ing] opportunities to control the learning of teachers, implementing province-wide professional development programs related to the latest public policy initiative" (Clark, 2012. p. 151).

The study found that agency in teacher professional learning, alone, will not necessarily contribute to the school improvement process; indeed it may even be detrimental if teacher professional learning is not linked to a clear school strategic plan or shared with colleagues in a productive, critical and reflective way. Yet, when principals and teachers jointly experience agency in their professional learning, there is great possibility for executing school improvement and change.

The study found a range of factors that both constrain and enable a culture of professional learning within a school. Additionally, it identified that it is important to understand and exploit the shifting balance between pressure and support required to optimise the conditions for that culture to flourish. A further contribution of the research is its emphasis on contextualised learning and capacity building within the school, rather than seeking outside learning opportunities as a preferred option. This might mean that the professional learning budget of a school may be reduced. It is also possible that increasing learning opportunities will arise for greater numbers of teachers as a result of developing a learning focus within the context of the school. The influence of the principal in generating such learning opportunities was a key finding of the research.

Professional learning from inside the school is an untapped resource in many schools. The potential for school improvement rises exponentially when teacher and principal agency is harnessed within a context of focused, relevant, on-going and collaborative, in-situ teacher professional learning. The heart of school improvement lies at our fingertips. It exists in the sometimes dormant potential of teachers who can make such difference to the lives of students. With the right circumstances, and the appropriate pressure and support from principal and teacher leaders within school communities, school improvement for the betterment of student learning and lives, is an attainable reality. This reality will be achieved when teacher professional learning draws from, and builds the strengths that are in existence inside school communities by harnessing energy to challenge, question and ultimately reframe practices.

It is appropriate to end with the words of American academic and researcher, Tom Carroll who writes of the power of the teacher within school improvement processes, but, more significantly, their power as part of a collective of teachers:

> A highly qualified teacher in every classroom is an idea whose time has passed. What's needed is high-quality teaching in every school. Quality teaching is not an individual accomplishment, it is the result of **a collaborative culture** that empowers teachers to team up to improve student learning beyond what any of them can achieve alone (Carroll, 2009. p. 12).

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Professional learning survey (RC)

Background to survey: This e-survey seeks to gauge teacher beliefs and understandings about what constitutes effective professional learning. Furthermore, it seeks to find out how teachers from this school view the importance of agency (choice) in their own learning and the principal's role in supporting effective teacher professional learning within the constraints of time and budget.

1. What is the difference between professional development and professional learning?

2. What type of teacher professional learning activities transfers most effectively into improved practice within your classroom?

	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Lecture or workshop	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Conference	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Presentations by experts in the field	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Action-research project	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Active membership of a professional body	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Collaborative learning project	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Tertiary study	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Peer learning partnership		Very		Slightly	Not at

	Extremely effective	effective	Somewhat effective	effective	all effective
Work with a professional mentor	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
School visits to observe practice	Extremely effective	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective

Other (please specify)

3. Describe the two most effective professional learning activities in which you have engaged over the past two years.

4. How important is it for you to have agency within your own professional learning?

For the purposes of this survey agency for teachers is described as: *Teachers having the opportunity to choose and engage in professional learning activities that lead to a change in school and classroom practice.*

Extremely important
Very important
Somewhat important
Slightly important
Not at all important

5. How important is it for the principal to value a culture of professional learning within the school?

6. What learning activities are important and effective for teachers, so that they can grow, develop and improve?

- ☐ Activities that involve critical reflection
- ☐ Activities that involve collaboration with colleagues
- ☐ Activities that involve action research
- ☐ Activities that involve the development of pedagogical and content knowledge
- ☐ All of the above

7. If you could engage in 30 hours of professional learning of your choice during the next 12 months, how would those 30 hours be distributed?

Conference	
Professional Reading	
Workshop	
School-based action research project	
Peer learning partnership	
Tertiary study	
Other	
Work with a professional mentor	
Engage with professional body activities	
School-based visits to observe practice	

On-line learning activities	

8. Why did you or didn't you choose to be part of this year's pilot collaborative learning project?

9. How would you like people outside of RC to describe its teacher professional learning practices?

10. How important is it for you to be part of a school that values the professional learning of its teachers?

Extremely important	Extremely important
Very important	Very important
Somewhat important	Somewhat important
Slightly important	Slightly important
Not at all important	Not at all important

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. All data is anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

Appendix 2 – Interview questions for volunteer teachers

Participants: Seven volunteer teachers who were involved in the pilot collaborative learning project

Interviewer: Critical friend

Purposes:
To understand in greater depth the enablers and restraints that affect teacher agency within their own professional learning at the site of study.

To gain insight into the principal's role in supporting conditions for teacher agency within their professional learning at the site of study.

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1. Outline the key influences that have shaped your interest in education.

2. Who has been the person of greatest influence in regards to your interest in professional learning? Why?

3. If you could observe another teacher in action in the classroom, who would it be and why?

4. If you were to gain feedback from another teacher about your practice. Who would that teacher be? Why? What areas of specific feedback would you be interested in?

5. How do you prefer to learn – individually, collaboratively, via doing, observing or listening?

6. What type of professional learning activities do you believe are most likely to lead to changes in practice within the classroom?

7. Can you identify principals who have influenced your own approach to professional learning? Explain how.

8. How does your current principal enable a climate of professional learning at this school (RC)?

9. What do you believe are the enablers and constraints affecting professional learning at RC?

10. For the purposes of this interview, teacher agency is described as: teachers having the opportunity to choose and engage in professional learning activities that lead to a change in school and classroom practice. How important is it to you, to have agency within your own learning? Explain.

11. How important is it for that agency to be shared through a collaborative learning project?

12. Has your attitude to professional learning altered in any way as a result of your participation in the Collaborative Learning Project? Explain.

13. Are you more comfortable with the term professional learning or professional development? Explain.

14. In an ideal situation what would teacher professional learning look like at RC?

15. How confident are you that professional learning is a valued commodity at RC?

16. What professional learning activities would you like to undertake in the next 5 years? Why?

Appendix 3 Interview questions for education consultants

Participants: Two educational consultants who facilitated the pilot collaborative learning project.

Interviewer: Critical friend

Purposes:

a) To gain an 'outside' perspective of professional learning processes – perceived strengths and weaknesses, at the site under study.

b) To gain a broad picture of the way in which professional learning works in other contexts and the enablers and constraints in existence in other sites.

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1. How do you define the terms professional learning and professional development? Which term are you more comfortable with? Why?

2. What experiences in your own background have led to a preference of one term over another?

3. What do you believe to be the key features of an effective professional learning culture?

4. What are your observations of the strengths and weaknesses of RC in terms of its professional learning practices?

5. How important is the principal's role in building an effective professional learning culture? Explain.

6. From your observations of RC, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the current principal's practices in this area?

7. You have been involved in schools that have developed strong professional learning cultures. What do you believe have been the three most important features of each of those schools? Has the principal been an influential part of those schools? Explain.

8. What model of educational leadership do you think supports effective teacher professional learning practices? Is there evidence of this type of leadership at RC? How?

9. For the purposes of this study, teacher agency is defined as - *teachers having the opportunity to choose and engage in professional learning activities that lead to a change in school and classroom practice.* How important do you believe it is for teachers to be able exercise agency in their professional learning?

10. What are examples of schools or professional learning projects within schools where teachers have had high levels of agency?

11. What difference does teacher agency make to the effectiveness and sustainability of professional learning?

12. Identify the factors that make collaboratively-based, in-school professional learning effective?

13. What advice do you offer in terms of creating sustainable and effective professional learning opportunities for the teachers at RC?

Appendix 4 Interview questions for focus group interview

Participants: Seven volunteer teachers who were involved in the collaborative learning pilot project to be interviewed following the individual interviews.

The focus group session is aimed at eliciting any further thoughts that were not included in the interview process. It is also hoped that through a collective group the interviewer might be able to draw out some deeper understandings about professional learning, teacher agency, and school improvement.

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1. **Interviewer will ask each of the seven teachers to share the following:**

    a) Definition of professional learning and professional development and the term that they prefer.
    b) Their preferred mode of professional learning and reasons for that preference.
    c) The best learning that occurred through their participation in the pilot collaborative learning project.
    d) The way in which they prefer to learn and how that learning affects classroom practice.
    e) Their understanding of the difference between teacher agency in professional learning and that which is dictated from the top.

2. **Consider the research that you have been involved in through the collaborative learning project**

    a) How have you shared your learning?
    b) How has your research and learning affected elements of your practice or pedagogy?
    c) Where to next …. What would you like to do with the work that you have been involved in through the project?
    d) Is there another element of practice that you would like to explore?
        i) What is it?
        ii) How might you go about that research?
    e) What were the most enjoyable aspects of the collaborative learning project?
    f) Is there merit in the school continuing to pursue collaborative learning, peer learning partnerships and action research? Why/why not?

Appendix 5 Teacher survey results – summary of responses

Question 1 **what do you understand *professional learning* to mean?**

On-going learning	▪ Continuous improvement ▪ Ongoing commitment and process ▪ Continued development ▪ Continuous learning ▪ To continue to develop ▪ Continuing to gain knowledge/ ongoing throughout your career ▪ Growing and changing Continued learning ▪ Learning during one's professional life ▪ Updating knowledge ▪ On-going learning ▪ Continual update ▪ Facilitating learning as a life-long process
Enhance and develop skills	▪ Update skills ▪ Update skills ▪ Enhance or update skill ability ▪ Upskilling ▪ Improve teaching skills ▪ Learning and gaining additional skills ▪ Improving professional skills ▪ Acquiring new skills ▪ Opportunity to upskill ▪ Enhance professional skills ▪ Enhance professional skills ▪ Lead to better teaching skills ▪ Develop our personal skills ▪ Gain wonderful skills ▪ Enhance skills ▪ Continued development of skills ▪ Development of skills ▪ Developing my existing skills ▪ Enhance and develop skills ▪ To develop your professional skills
Learning related to the profession	▪ Learning will be relevant to the specific profession and the current trends and issues that have emerged in that profession ▪ Learning specifically related to the profession ▪ Enhancing my career in my set profession ▪ To be developed professionally ▪ Professional growth of teachers ▪ Leads to improvement and change in the profession ▪ Reflecting on our own professional practice ▪ Learning in regards to your profession ▪ Learn about things that relate to our profession ▪ Gain a better understanding of the key elements of our profession

	▪ Engage in professional dialogue ▪ Concerned with my career ▪ Learning to enhance your profession ▪ We as professionals, undertake the experience of learning ▪ Improving my professional knowledge and practices
Improve effectiveness as teachers	▪ Improve our personal pedagogy/practice ▪ To enhance one's ability to be an effective educator ▪ Improves our effectiveness as teachers ▪ Enhances my knowledge and understanding of my role as an educator ▪ Makes us a better educator ▪ Improve teaching ▪ Empower us to become better teachers ▪ So that I am better informed and a better teacher ▪ Empowers teachers to reflect on various aspects of their teaching practice ▪ and effect changes where seen fit ▪ Improve their own practice ▪ Ultimately is supportive of offering opportunities to teachers to further our own understanding of teaching discipline and practice ▪ Pedagogical means of assisting others ▪ Develop and implement improved teaching practices
Type of learning	▪ It may be structured or occur incidentally ▪ The learning can take different formats and doesn't have to be attending a conference ▪ Professional learning usually occurs outside normal work practices ▪ Professional learning can take place outside the work environment as well as within it ▪ Either conscious or incidental that occurs during the course of a day ▪ Occurs in a formal context ▪ It is achieved by reading other viewpoints in articles, journals, online sources, study courses through universities/TAFE, workshops and lectures run by professional associations; discussions with colleagues; problem solving in the workplace whether it be unit development, lesson planning, student learning management, student behaviour management or curriculum development (all of these often undertaken with colleagues), research ▪ It may occur in a classroom, staff room or on a school excursion. It may occur in a structured setting with an identified goal or outcome or it may occur in a conversation between a teacher or two colleagues ▪ It includes reading, development through meetings, one to one learning, peer mentoring etc. ▪ Something we do as teachers everyday reflecting on our own

	professional practice, working with our colleagues, sharing ideas ▪ Can be offered in many different ways: readings, further study, conferences, network groups, email discussion groups, sharing with colleagues, membership of advocacy/professional groups etc. ▪ Undertaking study/learning into areas of direct relevance ▪ This professional learning may pertain to: pastoral, social, emotional and/or academic elements of my teaching practice, my relationships with staff members, students, parents of my students ▪ Subject specific knowledge coupled with subject specific teaching techniques ▪ Learning that takes place through conferences, seminars, workshops, collaboration with fellow teachers of the same subject area through professional reading e.g. Being members of professional associations including online groups that disseminate information about latest research etc ▪ Includes professional reading, sharing of ideas related to a particular teaching area whether that be via conferences or in house sharing amongst a team
Change	▪ Learning that prompts real change over time ▪ A way that qualified and experienced teachers can stay fresh and inspired by gaining new insights and ideas for teaching
Currency	▪ Remain current ▪ Stay up to date, fresh and current in our jobs ▪ Keep abreast with current trends in education particularly at a state and national level ▪ Updating knowledge to current practice so that current knowledge and practice can be analysed and implementation considered ▪ Latest research ▪ Improving, updating my knowledge base
Benefit students in their care	▪ Benefit the individual, their colleagues and students in their care ▪ Lead to better learning outcomes for students ▪ Improve student outcomes ▪ Improve the learning outcomes of the students we teach ▪ So as performance and outcomes can be enhanced by the learning

Summary of responses to Question 2

Describe the two most effective professional learning activities in which you have engaged over the past two years.

On-line course	II	▪ Subject specific
Lunchtime IT in-	I	o

service		
Panel verification/monitoring	II	▪ Observing/ participating
Subject area syllabus workshops or QSA	II	▪
Team teaching	II	▪ Classroom visits
Peer tutoring	III	▪ IWB training ▪ In class observation and teacher with teacher discussion ▪ Learning from colleagues – applying technology within the classroom
Peer partnership	I	▪ Focus on my own teaching practice
Collaborative Practices	IIIII IIIII III	▪ Informal conversation within staffroom ▪ Working with other teachers across a range of subject areas ▪ Discussing aspects of programs and teaching ▪ Meeting with teachers in the same year level to discuss practice/programming ▪ Collaborative learning project involved a trusted colleague and self ▪ Collaborative work in curriculum planning ▪ Action research project – beneficial because it has been sustained over a long time period ▪ Collaborative practice sessions ▪ Collaborative planning with small group ▪ Collaborative project with teacher identified need ▪ Collaboration with teacher of same teaching area
Self-directed study	III	▪ University study ▪ Advanced skills certificate course
Workshop Attendance	IIIII IIIII IIIII I	▪ Hands on skills directly applicable to classroom practice ▪ Interactive ▪ Strategies for the use of technologies ▪ Restorative practices ▪ Discussion about the use of data in everyday practice ▪ Relates directly to my practice ▪ Microsoft one note in-service ▪ Workshop with curriculum support ▪ Run by subject expert who demonstrated easy learning activities for classroom use – low on theory/high on practical ▪ Small group workshops with practical basis ▪ Hands on workshop for improving IT

		skills in classroom ▪ Business seminar exploring personality types and communication styles ▪ Workshop – actively engaging in teaching strategies applicable to classroom ▪ Interactive workshop with colleagues within subject area ▪ Practical tasks ▪ Workshop with teachers of same subject from different schools/ discuss assessment items ▪ Talking and interactive
English Teachers Association workshops and seminars	I	▪
Professional Discussion	III	▪ One on one mentoring ▪ Weekly discussion with fellow member of staff
Listening to expert speakers	IIIII	▪ Challenge thinking about practice ▪ Present relevant ideas for every day practice ▪ Subject specific lectures ▪ Lindsay Williams grammar session
Small group professional learning over an extended period of time/ learning circle... targeted to specific groups	II	▪ Professional ▪ Aspirational ▪ Reflective ▪ Active ▪ Engagement in a trial program – networking, small group conferencing
Conference	IIIII IIIII II	▪ Hands on activities ▪ School-based conference which allowed observation of teachers at work in classrooms ▪ Conference which involved observation of practice ▪ Lots of networking opportunities ▪ Good when they are 2 days or more in length – because it allows for greater networking with colleagues from other schools ▪ National association conference involving workshops, lectures and field work ▪ Subject specific conferences with hands on suggestions for classroom work and delivery – gave focus to benefit of team teaching ▪ Beginning teachers PD ▪ Changes of curriculum discussed ▪ Conference with a variety of topics and

		participants get to choose
Presenting at conferences or workshops	I	▪
First aid	I	▪
Working in teaching teams	I	▪ Informal conversation within staffroom ▪ Working with
School visit	I	▪ In depth examination of peer partnerships
Networking with colleagues	I	▪ Sharing information, processes, skills
Nothing of use at all	I	▪ Nothing of consequence in the past 2 years
PD offered internally	I	o
Professional reading	II	o
Seminar	l	▪ Australian curriculum – and how to implement (1 day)

Summary of responses to Question 5

Is professional learning valued within the school? How? How not?

Valued	Not valued	Comments
I		Need to ensure follow up time for implementation
I		Teachers are encouraged to improve their practice Unable to answer 'how not' Department also supports professional learning through sharing ideas Collaborative practice valued
I		Opportunities are provided
I		Financial support alone. College supports staff in their pursuit of areas of interest linked to education
I	I	Sometimes a source of frustration because it is seen as 'one more thing that needs to be completed'. Sometimes seen as very important within certain departments.
I		Highly valued Many opportunities for staff
I		Valued Ample opportunity and encouragement
I		Highly valued Almost always allowed to attend PL I deem as important
I		Highly valued Time is allocated through a range of different ways
I		Very valued An effective school tries to implement the best way for children to learn – the best way for children to learn is through effective teaching. Effective teaching comes from opportunities for teachers to improve – this concept is supported at this school.
I		But it would be better if there was one central focus which was followed up at a departmental level
I		To some degree. Budget constraints restrict opportunities.
I		Always opportunities being offered and there are routinely in-school pl opportunities that are provided to staff
I		Highly valued within the current educational environment
I		Lots of opportunities. Usually I have had the choice to attend. Always something of value even at school based professional learning – always better to go yourself than have to listen
I		Mostly – opportunity to attend relevant pd but sometimes school-based pd is not relevant to all year levels
I		Yes – many sessions are self-choice
I		Wide opportunity for attendance. Frustrating when terrific pd is not implemented despite assurances that it will be
I		Plethora of applications received regularly. Teachers more willing to adopt 'anonymous' less accountable pl in the form of action research than the more confronting peer learning

		partnerships despite articulating interest.
I		Lots of opportunities, including self-choice/self-selection.
I		Highly valued. Teachers are given autonomy for finding out what suits their individual needs.
I		More valuable when teachers can see tangible outcomes – then they love it (otherwise they don't engage)
I		Yes but of more value when professional decision-making occurs
I		Yes – opportunities to be involved and to travel to pl
I		Highly valued. Provides funding and involvement in funded projects.
I		Plenty on offer. Whole scale pl does not offer much choice in engagement
I		School very supportive of staff learning.
I		Yes. Regular learning opportunities - compulsory and voluntary, often at no cost.
I		Yes which allows better learning outcomes for students
I		Yes, through granting of leave, financial support of discipline specific learning
I	I	Yes when it is context specific and relevant to one's classroom. Not valued by staff when it is too generic
I		Valued by leadership administration and other staff. Must be chosen by staff -to be most effective it needs to be voluntary
I		Yes. I have never been refused an opportunity.
I		Plenty of opportunity and lots of encouragement
I		Yes valued and encouraged – challenge is access and time
I		Yes valued and shared with other staff.
I		Yes, provides a common body of group knowledge
I		Yes – QCOT requirement and school provides substantial PD opportunities
I		Yes – always been able to attend and results/findings are shared
I		Yes
I		Yes a culture that supports it but less effective if it is chosen for you and it doesn't fit your timetable or assessment commitments
I		Yes but sometimes there is only partial funding
I		Yes particularly if it is directly useful to an individual's classroom teaching
	I	Not always a fair allocation of resources – some gain more access than others

Summary of responses to Question 6

Identify some of the ways in which professional learning could (realistically) be better supported at your school.

Time	• Allow time for teacher preparation and consolidation • Allow time for consolidation after PD if only one teacher has attended

	• Advertise content of PD more explicitly • Ensure staff meetings aren't hijacked by other matters if they have been earmarked for collaborative practice • Time release • Time for implementation and planning • Ensure time is not taken up by sharing practices • So much happening that you feel you can't afford to be away … this stops me from applying for things • More time flexibility • Time – but it is a complex issue. Sometimes junior school teachers find that children fret when they are absent. • The school should not assume that action learning etc. can take place within the current timetable – time needs to be allocated.
Implementation after PL	• Time allocated for implementation of learning • Time to relay, share and teach information • Time is needed to implement new knowledge/skills • Report back to departments about what has been learnt. Department to check on implementation a few weeks after attendance
Report back	• Include others in the experience by sharing after return/ try to consolidate experience through sharing before 'the busyness of schedules' take over upon return • Interesting to find out what others have attended • Perhaps a site where staff can give a synopsis of their experience/ share powerpoints etc. • Perhaps an evening session once per term for sharing
Presenter quality	• With realistic ideas that can be transferred into classroom practice
Block PD	• 2 days per term just devoted to professional development activities
Already well supported	IIII I
Effective use of ACR	• Let teachers feel supported through effective supervision in their absence. More supply teachers
Positive support	• "By not telling teachers that very soon they will have to get the 30 hours of professional learning up by doing it in their own time"
Short and frequent delivery	• E.g. 'just in time learning' like the IT department
Greater use of guest experts accessible to whole staff	
Relevant to classroom	• Ensuring its direct relevance to the individual • Specific to department/subject area

practice	• More time for departmental meetings • Department based professional learning
Clarify direction	• E.g. Ensure all sectors of the college are involved in programs that are seen as valuable e.g. Restorative practices
Financial assistance	• Support teachers to attend one professional association conference every 12 months • Attendance at national conferences • More funding for specific courses within departments
Allowing choice	• A professional makes the decision to take part when it is relevant and necessary to their learning • Needs to be voluntary to have value • Identify staff needs and a professional learning priority agenda • Allow us to choose what we do and don't do and allow time in student free days for this • Shared availability – not dictated which teachers are to attend

Summary of responses to Question 8

Why did you or didn't you choose to be part of this year's pilot collaborative learning project?

	• Have done so in the past and will in the future
Opportunity to learn	• Enjoy the team work, energy from a shared passion, the opportunity to work together to solve or at least address a problem in the hope of a positive effect upon the College's policy/culture and student learning • An opportunity to learn was the attraction • Because I enjoy learning from colleagues • I enjoy learning and working with colleagues rather than working on my own – developing a shared vision • So that I could learn from my partner and together we could help each other • To gain a better understanding of a new area in curriculum • It was a great opportunity to learn more about my own practice • To learn more and develop relationships with colleagues • Because the people working around me understand more effectively the challenges, culture and clientele that comprise this school • A great opportunity to work with others and to better understand my work and theirs • I wanted to receive personalised feedback on the effectiveness of my teaching

	• I felt I could learn by observing my peers and having them observe me • I value the opinion of another professional who can directly comment on my practice
Time	• Time • New school and enough to do already • Not enough time • Lack of time • My circumstances did not allow for my involvement though I have a strong belief in this sort of learning • Mainly time constraints • I have other work commitments that take up a lot of time • Time constraints • Time • Time issues • Time. Not clear on mission • New teacher/ did not want to over commit myself • Plenty to do without this • Too many other things to focus on • Time – already over committed and overworked
Improvement	• To help investigate a concern and see how we co • I'm always interested in becoming better at my job
Not relevant to learning needs	• Not involved because I learn better in a workshop situation • Felt I could spend my time better in developing curriculum and planning units of work • Could not see what use it would be to me • Not being allowed to work in my department which is what I want to do
Expectation to be involved	• "I thought it would be frowned upon if I didn't" • I felt obliged to, other staff asked me to join their group
Involved before	• Valuable – have witnessed benefits to such an approach
Exciting	• I am always keen to try something new and different. I am flexible and try to be innovative in my practice. • I enjoy the inspiration others provide
Agency	• Allowed me to be engaged in a project relevant to me • Important to me

Summary of responses to Question 9

How would teachers from outside this school describe its (RCs) professional learning experiences?

Other schools have …	A variety of opportunities also
This school is seen as …	Innovative and comprehensive Providing excellent experiences Having impressive partnership and motivation

	Impressive and inclusive in its approach to professional learning Supporting professional learning Collaborative and varied Supporting its teachers Focused on national curriculum for this year Leading the way in education in Toowoomba because it has 'money' Provide access and quality learning for its teachers Extremely professional and energetic Interactive, collaborative, based on trust and collegiality Forward thinking in its approach Innovative and supportive Extremely high standard, they would like to engage in it Well supported and mostly relevant Excellent opportunities and a strong focus Lots of opportunities to learn Impressed by high level of engagement Good Supportive of internal and external PL Values PD Encouraged and offered opportunity Available and supported Extremely happy Allows staff to attend subject specific events – not too much or too little
Other teachers …	Value our opportunities Are envious
	I have never been to a school where so much professional learning is offered
	Varied and comprehensive
	Don't know
	No idea